

**A study of alterity and influence
in the literary and philosophical neighbourhood of
Jean Genet and Emmanuel Levinas**

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29 January 2008

Thesis Abstract

The dissertation is a chiasmic reading of the works of Jean Genet and Emmanuel Levinas, examining the way they each address the relation to the Other in terms of ethics and subjectivity. Whereas a straightforward association between the two writers might seem paradoxical because of the differences in their approaches and rhetoric, a chiasmic reading allows intricate approaches, moments of proximity and departures to be read both conceptually and aesthetically. We show that these two writers share a tightly-woven discursive neighbourhood, and examine that neighbourhood through detailed analysis of various textual encounters. We trace patterns of influence which allow us to consider our writers' decision-making processes in the genesis of their texts.

Genet and Levinas develop views surprisingly close to each other's of the "face-to-face encounter", which they place at the origin of language seen both as expression and commandment. Each approaches that encounter simultaneously in terms of the possibility of welcome, and the possibility of violence and betrayal. Considerations of influence from sources common to both, especially Paul Valéry and Fyodor Dostoevsky, serve to extend our analysis of their thought on address to include the encounters they share within discursive history and across the genres.

The theatre figures in both oeuvres as a powerful way of considering the radical passivity of the individual's relation to the world. The passive subject, unable to escape alterity, is also unable to escape a certain liberty of choice and action, and a call to engagement. This call may take surprising forms, and even provoke the subject's defection over to the Other; or the substitution of the Other's claims for its own. This interstice between the individual and a plural world serves to disorder totalisation, characterised by hostility, and open new possibilities of interaction in its place.

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Abbreviations*

Levinas Texts

<i>ADV</i>	<i>L'Au-delà du verset: lectures et discours talmudiques</i> (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1982)
<i>AQE</i>	<i>Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence</i> (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974)
<i>AQEb**</i>	<i>Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence</i> (Paris: Martinus Nijhoff/biblio essais, 1978)
<i>OB</i>	<i>Otherwise than Being</i> , trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1981)
<i>DEE</i>	<i>De l'existence à l'existant</i> (Paris: Vrin, 1963)
<i>DHH</i>	<i>En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger</i> , 3rd edn rev. with new essays (Paris: Vrin, 2001)
<i>DL</i>	<i>Difficile Liberté</i> , 3 rd edn rev. (Paris: Albin Michel/biblio essais, 1976)
<i>DLM</i>	<i>Dieu, la mort et le temps</i> , notes Jacques Rolland (Paris: Grasset/biblio essais, 1995)
<i>DMT</i>	<i>Dieu, la mort et le temps</i> , notes by Jacques Rolland (Paris: Grasset/biblio essais, 1995)
<i>DVI</i>	<i>De Dieu qui vient à l'idée</i> , 2 nd edn (Paris: Vrin, 1986)
<i>EeI</i>	<i>Éthique et infini</i> (Paris: Arthème Fayard/biblio essais, 1982)
<i>EN</i>	<i>Entre Nous</i> (Paris: Grasset/biblio essais, 1991)
<i>EV</i>	<i>De l'évasion</i> , intro. Jacques Rolland (Paris: Fata Morgana/biblio essais, 1982)
<i>HdH</i>	<i>Humanisme de l'autre homme</i> (Paris: Fata Morgana/ biblio essais, 1972)
<i>NP</i>	<i>Noms Propres</i> (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1976)
<i>OBL</i>	<i>De l'oblitération</i> , on Sacha Sosno, photography by André Villers, 2 nd edn (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1998)
<i>PH</i>	<i>Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme</i> (Paris: Éditions Payot/Rivages, 1997)
<i>RO</i>	'La Réalité et son ombre', <i>Les Imprévus de l'histoire</i> (Paris: Fata Morgana/biblio essais, 1994), orig. <i>Les Temps Modernes</i> , 38 (1948), 771-89.
<i>TA</i>	<i>Le temps et l'autre</i> , 5 th edn (Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 1994)

* Abbreviations will be used in the body of the text without prior footnote reference.

** We quote *Autrement qu'être* and *Totalité et infini* in both the Nijhoff and 'biblio essais' editions, and mark the 'biblio essais' edition with a 'b'. For these two texts we have also added the 'b' marker to their *Ibid.* notation, giving *Ibidb* for the 'biblio essais' edition.

<i>TaI</i>	<i>Totality and Infinity</i> , trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne, 1969) (2007)
<i>TeI</i>	<i>Totalité et infini</i> (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961)
<i>Telb</i> ***	<i>Totalité et infini</i> (Paris: Martinus Nijhoff/biblio essais, 1971)
<i>THI</i>	<i>Théorie de l'intuition dans la Phénoménologie de Husserl</i> , 8 th edn (Paris: Vrin, 2001)
<i>SMB</i>	<i>Sur Maurice Blanchot</i> (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1975)

Genet Texts

GOC *Jean Genet Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951-1991), in six volumes, will be referred to as *GOC* followed by the corresponding volume number.

GTC *Jean Genet Théâtre Complet*, ed. Michel Corvin and Albert Dichy (Paris: Gallimard/Pleiade, 2002) will be referred to as *GTC*.

<i>AC</i>	'Les Palestiniens', <i>Genet à Chatila</i> , texts collected by Jérôme Hankins (Paris: Solin, 1992)
<i>AT</i>	<i>L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti</i> , ill. edn (Paris: L'Arbalète, 1963)
<i>CA</i>	<i>Un captif amoureux</i> , (Paris: Gallimard, 1986)
<i>Cat</i>	<i>Genet</i> , exhibition catalogue, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tours, 8 April-3 July 2006 (Paris: Farrago, 2006)
<i>CQR</i>	'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers et foutu aux chiottes', <i>GOC4</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), orig. <i>Tel Quel</i> , 80 (Spring, 1967)
<i>ED</i>	<i>L'Ennemi déclaré</i> , <i>GOC6</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 1991)
<i>EMD</i>	'L'Étrange mot d'...', <i>GOC4</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), orig. <i>Tel Quel</i> , 30, 1967
<i>Frag</i>	<i>Fragments... et autres textes</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), orig. publ. of 'Fragments...', <i>Les Temps modernes</i> , 105 (August 1954)
<i>ImQU</i>	<i>Querelle de Brest</i> (Paris: Gallimard/Imaginaire, 2004)
<i>JV</i>	<i>Journal du Voleur</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 1949)
<i>MR</i>	<i>Miracle de la rose</i> <i>GOC3</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), orig. (Lyon: Barbazet, 1946)
<i>NE</i>	<i>Les Nègres</i> , <i>GOC4</i> (Paris: L'Arbalète, 1958)
<i>ND</i>	<i>Notre-Dame-des-fleurs</i> , <i>GOC2</i> (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), orig. (Paris: L'Arbalète, 1948)
<i>PF</i>	<i>Pompes funèbres</i> , <i>GOC3</i> orig. (Paris: Bikini, Morihien, 1948)
<i>QU</i>	<i>Querelle de Brest</i> , <i>GOC3</i> orig. (Without author's or editor's name, 1947)

*** See previous note.

Dostoevsky Texts

- AD* *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, (London: Everyman, 2003)
- BK* *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David Magarshak (London: Penguin, 1958)
- CP* *Crime and Punishment*, trans. David Magarshak (London: Penguin, 1951)
- HofD* *The House of the Dead*, trans. David MacDuff (London: Penguin, 1985)
- ID* *The Idiot*, trans. David Magarshak (London: Penguin, 1955)
- PO* *The Devils [The Possessed]*, trans. David Magarshak (London: Penguin, 1953)

Valéry Texts

- VO* *Paul Valéry Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957-1960), in two volumes, will be referred to as *VO*, followed by the corresponding volume number.
- ÂeD* ‘L’Âme et la Danse’, *Eupalinos ou l’Architecte, précédé de L’Âme et la Danse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1924)
- DDD* *Degas Danse Dessin*, ill. edn (Paris: Gallimard/folio essais, 1965)
- Eup* ‘*Eupalinos ou l’Architecte*’ précédé par ‘*L’Âme et la Danse*’ (Paris: Gallimard, 1924)
- M.T* *Monsieur Teste* (Paris: Gallimard/Imaginaire, 1978)

Other Texts

- AX* Nietzsche, Friedrich, ‘The Anti-Christ’, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*, eds Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- Aesth* Hegel, G.W.F., *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) II (1975)
- BofT* Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966)
- BW* Heidegger, Martin, ‘Letter on Humanism’, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993)
- CW* Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966)
- DI* Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. and trans. Michael

- Holquist, Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 1982)
- ECM Derrida, Jacques, 'En ce moment même dans cet ouvrage me voici', *Psyché: Invention de l'autre*, expanded edn (Paris: Galilée, 1998)
- GE Emmanuel Levinas: *The Genealogy of Ethics* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995)
- Glas Derrida, Jacques, *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974)
- GR Guattari, Félix, 'Genet retrouvé' *Revue d'études palestiniennes*, Special issue, 'Jean Genet et la Palestine' (Washington DC: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1997) 49-64
- HI *The HypoCritical Imagination: Between Kant and Levinas* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000)
- LM Bataille, Georges, 'Genet', *La Littérature et le mal* (Paris: Flammarion/ Coll. folio, 1990)
- Nancy Nancy, Claire, 'La raison dramatique', *Po&sie*, 99 (2002), 111-21
- NdT Nietzsche, F., *La naissance de la tragédie: Fragments posthumes (Automne 1869-Printemps 1872)*, trans. Michel Haar, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy (Gallimard: Paris, 1977)
- OWTL Heidegger, M., *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper, 1982)
- PD Bakhtin, M., *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984)
- PS Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977)
- QDL Rolland, Jacques, *Dostoïevski: La question de l'autre*, (Paris: Verdier, 1983)
- SC Hegel, G.W.F., 'The Spirit of Christianity', *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975)
- StG Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952)
- TaS Visker, Rudi, *Truth and Singularity* (London: Kluwer, 1999)
- Tam Taminiaux, Jacques, *Le théâtre des philosophes* (Grenoble: Millon, 1995)
- VeM Derrida, Jacques, 'Violence et Métaphysique', *Écriture et la Différence* (Paris: Seuil/Points Essais, 1967)

Introduction

Genet and Levinas have each received wide-ranging attention from the critical community for the way they address the philosophical and aesthetic questions of subjectivity and ethics. They each provide important contributions which illuminate the traumas of being from observations of the minutiae of selfhood. In spite of this, they have very rarely been examined in relation to one another. Their respective approaches and the crossing points between them create a critical neighbourhood across literature and philosophy. By studying this neighbourhood, especially in terms of its margins, and its proximity with further writers, it is possible for their apparently very different objectives and rhetoric to be shown to share a common attentiveness to the flicker of transcendence in the other. More demanding still, this neighbourhood points to the capacity of each author to address the involvement of this sense of alterity with the hatred of the other.

Levinas is sometimes held to the utopian ambitions of certain readers who, when describing ethics, are tempted to overplay or oversimplify the disruptive power of the other in its alterity. It is important to note that this power is not physical resistance, but instead the ethical commandment of the other which reaches the subject preconsciously. The need to relate this originary kindling of ethics in the other to the pragmatic political world has led other critics – through dissatisfaction both with the state of the world and of the human sciences – to become increasingly demanding of Levinas's view of the irruption of the other and its effect on action. In *Ethical Issues in Twentieth-Century French Fiction*, Colin Davis produces a critique of Levinasian commandment through a reading of Genet. He arrives at the position that if commandment does not work or is not obeyed, then ethics does not control human behaviour; that on balance "Levinas's philosophy offers no means of establishing a regulative link between ethical responsibility and actual behaviour".¹ This would seem somewhat at odds with Davis's acknowledgement that in Genet, the transgression involved in betrayal

¹ Colin Davis, *Ethical Issues in Twentieth-Century French Fiction: Killing the Other* (London: MacMillan, 2000), p.187.

itself implies an acknowledgement of its opposite – responsibility – and the priority it takes: a position that Genet holds in common with Levinas. The central issue is the passage from commandment to action. Here Davis favours Genet’s “concentration on the fact that responsibility does not entail compulsion.”² It should be pointed out that in Levinas, compulsion is also eschewed. But the fascinating rigour of Genet’s descriptions of ethics and the hatred of the other man is indeed compelling. However, Davis’s opposition erroneously attributes to Genet the position of supporting the banality of evil, which his own examples do not bear out.

Earlier in the essay, Davis articulates the difference between the two writers by imputing to them, in a surprising dual formulation, a contrasting understanding of ‘altericide’ which oversimplifies the issues to the point of caricature. By evoking *Querelle de Brest* he explains, “Levinas is like Gil, the unwitting murderer who regrets his crime and seeks to deny it; Genet’s writing on the other hand, occupies the position of Querelle, the deliberate, self-conscious murderer who has taught himself to desire his own crimes.”³ While one understands the synecdoche by which Genet’s writing, as a whole, is being compared to the position of Querelle, one of Genet’s own characters, this critical comparison does not adequately describe the movements within these writings or their active and disruptive role in relation to discourse. Davis seems to pitch a poetic realist who knows the world is foul against someone billed as a wishful idealist, who merely longs this were not the case. On the one hand, such a reading fails to rework the perceived deadlock in Levinasian studies between ethics and politics; and on the other, it implies that in Genet the desire of crime runs without challenge. But when Genet finds bad conscience within good conscience, he is not doing it primarily to prove to the reader simply that the bad takes place, but to implicate the reader in its unfurling. Merely corroborating betrayal as something that happens would not function as a critique, even of the kind Davis envisages, but would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Genet’s work does not limit itself to

² Davis, *Ethical Issues*, p.187.

³ Davis, *Ethical Issues*, p.185.

demonstrating lack of compulsion, but also examines the complication this produces in the originary disposition which takes notice of the other. He performs this complication by projecting parallel encounters through the evocative power of language; these produce internal dramas which examine responsibility in its intimate relation to betrayal.

Davis seeks to avoid a complacent reading of Levinas which presents him as a sort of philanthropist. But in so doing, he risks not doing justice to the competition between the different ethical demands Levinas's thinking is able to describe. When Levinas describes the human encounter as presupposing responsibility, in which "[l]a guerre suppose la paix" (*TeI*, p.174, *TeIb*, p.218), this is not a utopian declaration. What Levinas is alerting us to is the difficulty of penetrating an inhuman condition that would seem to contradict the earlier statement, in which "[l]a paix des empires sortis de la guerre repose sur la guerre." (*Ibid.*, X, *Ibidb*, p.6) Not only does War presuppose Peace, but peace in a politics of totality, which aims to win by any means necessary, rests on war. This is because the exterior relations with the other necessary for peace, (or, indeed, to win a war) are eroded, merely enlarging war's sphere. In the face of conflict, however, originary alterity may still be discovered, for good conscience is assailed by the environment, which consciousness has to interpret, and in the process produces disquiet. This is where Genet's literary encounters across discursive history come into play, showing the dissipation, mutation and resurgence of obligation.

From a critical point of view, the mobility of encounter itself serves to bring together neighbouring enquiries, allowing them to pose difficult questions to each other, clarifying or intensifying the concerns of each writer. This is not performed through direct dialogue, Genet and Levinas do not mention one another in their works; neither is it a question of an intertextuality in which merely ambient ideas crop up; instead their shared concern is for the nature of encounter itself, both in the face-to-face relation, and in the hermeneutics of adaptation and influence. Where singularity is detected there is language. In Levinas, the

originary form of this language is the commandment of the face which seeks to speak in discourse.

Davis as well as other critics have consistently run the risk of attributing directly to Genet positions which he is, instead, complicating and inflecting through the processes of his stylisation. While it is important not to be enraptured by poetry in the examination of ethical debates that call instead for vigilance, resistance to the effects of fascination should not lead us to keep Genet's writing at arm's length as a way of inuring ourselves to its enigmas; for those too may conceal otherness. Readings of multiplicity of tone may find their greatest enemy in readings of influence if these work only in the light of a single source. For example in a discussion of Genet's epigraph in *Querelle de Brest* on Oscar Reich, the Butcher of Drancy, rather than producing a reading on the face-to-face relation, Harry E. Stewart comments simply: "A man made to Genet's order!"⁴ Stewart's text is full of perceptive textual remarks and historical research, and yet comes over as rigorously unliterary. The dialogic capacity of Genet's writing is dissolved in its context without regard for the fragmentary nature of this writing. In Ivan Jablonka's study⁵, the gap between reading historical sources and reading the literary artefact seems even more marked than in Stewart's approach. Éric Marty has commented on the Levinasian receptiveness to alterity in Genet's theatre⁶; but he does not adequately measure the tensile inventiveness of the prose works. He sees them as monological expressions of a compulsive authorial intent – in the form of an "angoisse du Bien" – rather than as renderings of bipolar ethical impulses in the subject generally.⁷

⁴ Harry E. Stewart, *Jean Genet: from Fascism to Nihilism* (Peter Lang: London, 1994), p.90. The epigraphs are reproduced in the body of the Imaginaire edition. (*ImQU*, pp.19-20)

⁵ Ivan Jablonka, *Les vérités inavouables de Jean Genet* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

⁶ Éric Marty, 'Jean Genet dramaturge ou l'expérience de l'Autre', *Critique*, 671 (April, 2003), 252-65 (p.255).

⁷ Éric Marty, *Bref séjour à Jérusalem* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), pp.91-96.

We shall be examining closely the intricacies of the encounter with the other embedded in the texts of Genet and Levinas; and to do so, we will be analysing their textual encounters through the intermediary of other writers in philosophical and literary history. These discourses are not compared directly, but in the manner of approaches and departures around shared preoccupations or modes of expression, be they conceptual or aesthetic, creating a chiasmus between our two writers. Our textual encounters do not therefore take place within a single well delimited corpus, but in a diverse neighbourhood in which the literatures of different nations and languages circulate, as well as different genres and times. Our analysis of the influence produced on our writers from within a tightly-woven discursive neighbourhood common to both will allow us to consider certain decision-making processes they make when creating their texts. Amongst the sources shared by our writers we shall consider especially Paul Valéry and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The engagement of both Genet and Levinas with each of these writers allows their concerns to be discussed in relation to novelistic and poetic language, starting from questions of voice and the circulation of experience between the mind and the world; while theatre will later emerge as a privileged form for Genet and Levinas in the presentation of subjectivity.

This approach involves the introduction of beacon terms and a continual return to them in the course of our text. They will appear in different lights, and gain meaning iteratively. This method will be familiar to the reader of continental philosophy. More particularly, this dissertation seen as a reading of influence must take sometimes more concrete, sometimes more circuitous routes through its secondary sources and other accompanying material. Alterity by definition has a strong association with the unknown, and for that reason is approached in diverse ways by writers in the source texts of our study. To follow the impact of the unknown on the subject will require the reader's patience as we delve into and follow traces in arguments of adaptation and origin. To read alterity and influence together through shifting usage and inflexion will involve detailed checking forwards and backwards between different terms, texts, and genres.

Levinas is well known for the unusual use he makes of certain terms, and for their recurrence throughout his work with subtle evolutions of meaning. Our own iterative approach will seek to clarify these evolutions. This practice in Levinas's writing can also be said to have something literary about it in so far as it makes particularly extensive exegetical demands. We shall take three pairs of key terms as examples which the reader might like to keep in mind, and we will indicate briefly here the suggestiveness with which they draw together the two writers of our study.

To begin, we shall take a pair of terms each of which refers to the third person singular form in French, 'il'. First, the *il y a*, which indicates anonymous, impersonal being within which the subject has no power or initiative and from which the subject cannot extricate him or herself. It resembles impersonal verbs such as *il pleut* or *il neige* in that none is under the command of the 'I' of the subject, or within its power. It is used by Levinas to describe the suffering of the subject within pure being, an atmosphere within which various Genet characters, not least the narrator of the novels, are imprisoned and crave an escape by reaching out to alterity. The partner term arriving far later in Levinas's writing and thought is *illéité*. Once again it is formed from the 'il' form, but this time it is used to describe not an indifferentiation within pure being, but a connectedness to the other; and not just any other, but an unnameable and absent third, the Other (*Autrui*). The Other is beyond the direct claims made on it by a particular individual or party; but it imposes responsibility and releases the subject from bondage in the *il y a*. The *il y a* and *illéité* therefore bespeak a relationship respectively to being, and to alterity, which is beyond being. Levinas considers the intimation of the beyond being from a position of being to be the key ethical event of the human.

Another pairing of terms is *trahison* and *défection*, each of which has Genetian as well as Levinasian resonances. While betrayal might at first seem an activity more familiar to Genet, it figures in Levinas in the form of compromises made in a plural world between an individual other and the Other – as figured in

illéité. Defection on the other hand can denote involuntary movement beyond the preoccupation with one's own being, placing one at the disposal of an other, who may be an enemy; whose claim is heard, one could say, even in the fort of the *for intérieur* of the subject.

A third example is used to describe the subject's encounter with the world in the *en-deçà* and *au-delà de l'être*, which Alphonso Lingis translates as "the hither side" and the "beyond" being, and which we will often refer to as the 'near side' and the 'beyond'. (*OB*, p.28) As preconscious events arrive on the hither side of being, they are interpreted by the subject's mind. As they pass through reduction, that which was on the hither side of being, but has not been explainable by ontology, may flicker on its thither side, i.e. beyond being. The Other may, therefore, disrupt being, while these terms are a way of catching valencies which are not usually measured in the rational mind. Also the separation between the *en-deçà* and the *au-delà* brings with it the need for judgement and the pursuit of truth in reality taken generally, through the need for interpretation. The hither side of being cannot operate alone since it is only made up of states and sensations, and must enter into the drama and conflict of being in order to pursue what is beyond it. The pain, evolution and drama involved in the interpretation of phenomena themselves encourage vigilance; something which both art and ethics may also favour.

Genet and Levinas are read here as contributing to such vigilance: both within the word of discourse, and in the traces and passages between this word and a world which is as yet unenunciated.

Chapter I: Alterity and Influence in Dostoevsky

[C]ette activité dérivée est essentielle à la production dans tous les genres.

Qu'il s'agisse de la science ou des arts, on observe, si l'on s'inquiète de la génération des résultats, que toujours *ce qui se fait* répète *ce qui fut fait*, ou le réfute: le répète en d'autres tons, l'épure, l'amplifie, le simplifie, le charge ou le surcharge; ou bien rétorque, l'extermine, le renverse, le nie; mais donc le suppose, et l'a invisiblement utilisé.

Valéry (*VOI*, p.634)

1. Intersubjective space and polysemy

This chapter will examine the relationship of the self to the other in literary interaction and adaptation. The encounter with the other may create an opening, which is both the possibility of human contact and intimacy, but also of untold difference. This chapter examines these experiences through a reading of the relationship with the other in Dostoevsky, and the ways in which this seems to have influenced Genet and Levinas. Levinas conceptualises this encounter with the other as the anteriority of responsibility to any given interaction with the other, thus making ethics first philosophy. Meanwhile, Genet's writing describes through different registers of separation the tensions between the subject's egology and the exterior. By bringing an alchemy of appearance to bear on morality, the reader is brought into proximity with the mystery of a world of primary, though not necessarily reliable, first-hand ethical experience in which the language used to denote these realities has undergone a shift, bringing criminal and devotional universes into mutual proximity. A reading of the influence of Dostoevsky upon Genet and Levinas will serve to illuminate the similarities in characterisation they give the structure of the subject, the relationship to the other, and the complexity of interpreting the phenomena involved in ethical realities.

In Dostoevsky, independent characters form separate, equally valid worlds whilst at the same time entering into one another's proximity, and altering one another's orbits. Mutual influence is thus described with enormous verisimilitude and complexity. Dostoevsky characterizes two different kinds of multi-voiced writing which are of particular interest to us: one interpersonal, between different characters and their worlds; the other transliterary as the peculiarly rich intertextual quality of novelistic discourse creates reminders and reworkings of a whole history of writing; a language which is, as Bakhtin expresses it, at once "living and acting in the great dialogue of the epoch and calling back and forth to kindred ideas of other epochs." (PD, p.89) Parallel to the event of interactions between characters and the heteroglossia of their environment, within literature there also runs a history of reevocation, encounter, and reconstrual. The invisible valencies of the encounters which constitute intersubjective space are thus reproduced in writing, such that the passage into proximity with various orbits leaves traces of form or meaning. Character, plot, *intrigue*, and trace may thus be drawn from apparently unconnected sources and splice unexpected signatories into one another in common address. The symphonic aspect of polyphony found in communication should therefore be understood in the context of language as a whole. Thus, however tortuous or apt to manifest itself in undeclared opposition to hidden sources, influence can provide insight into the mysterious significance of the human encounter which rather than transcribing a symphonic whole onto a single keyboard, may alter the resonance of the single voice in its difference and separation, cupping it in an ethical acoustic, setting off sympathetic notes from unknown sources.

The influence of Dostoevsky is everywhere apparent in the work of the two authors of this study, and may provide a kind of subterranean bridge between their practices. The possibility of opening a channel of communication between the two seems especially promising as each of our authors not only quotes, adapts and structures around Dostoevsky, but also enters critically into discussion of his influence on themselves. This is especially unusual for Genet, who preferred to give an idea of himself as entirely self-made, which would make him resistant to

attempts to trace his sources. However, in this instance, he even goes so far as to leave a critical text for us, '*Les Frères Karamazov*' (1981), set aside for publication at the same time as *Un captif amoureux*. As for Levinas, he also directly acknowledges his debt to the Russian author and stresses the scientific role of art in bringing being in general to our understanding:

L'expression artistique assemblerait l'être en signification et apporterait ainsi la lumière originelle qu'emprunterait le savoir scientifique lui-même.
(*HdH*, pp.28-29)

But the importance of examining the texts primarily for the notions or ideas which inhabit the characters, rather than simply themes or arguments is, as Bakhtin stresses, to curb the temptation to reflect upon Dostoevsky's writing as though it were comprised of a piecing together of conceptual assertions into a single finished treatise or single-levelled scientific enquiry. (*PD*, pp.85-90) Neither Genet nor Dostoevsky as literary writers are speaking directly in the guise of a philosopher, but seek in their individual styles of representation to show the relationship between sense as meaning and sense as the experience of the senses. Meaning, its experiential canopy, and powers of association may interact in the subject to produce uncharted conceptions and confrontations. Levinas himself, as a phenomenologist, by looking at experience, eschews a finished system. These writers do not therefore work for the unveiling of a common single truth, but seek uncertainties and inconsistencies that serve to reveal their objects of interest. In the same way, the reader's struggle to interpret the material and to relate it to the world comes in fits and starts, intuitions and leaps of understanding, as in an instance of *esprit d'escalier*. A book cannot be understood in one fell swoop but takes teams and generations of readers, as thoughts and interpretations prompt and exceed one another. Thus, the activity of dynamic interpretation for Levinas

mirrors the activity of a community, leading him to refer to such cognitive interaction as no longer “objectivation”, but “société”. (*DHH*, p.188)⁸

Society is therefore teaming with distinct intervals rather than being the monolithic result of unitary historical time. Genet observes in his interview with Hubert Fichte that Dostoevsky creates a different time for each character, necessitating dynamic interpretation between shifting horizons. (*ED*, p.166) Bakhtin describes the Dostoevsky character as independent, able to interact with the environment in a real present, one might say, as though it were a quill dipped repeatedly into its own interiority. (*PD*, p.5) The individual character can share this present without being simultaneous or quite contemporaneous to the other characters, and as though not bent to the will and language of the author, but instead as “a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word”. (*Ibid.*) To the depth of the independent individual, then, is added the inflectional complexity of language between individuals and the depth of literary and historical expression, in which these inflections have been reproduced and studied. It is for this reason that the novel as a genre tests discourse generally and especially literary discourse. (*DI*, p.412) Novelists employ heroes who look at life through the eyes of literature or another ambient discourse, while these heroes are at the same time preoccupied with the devices through which this account or discourse is related. The elliptical and manifold nature of voice and the different times converging therein mean that the residue of the unsaid is preserved, and leads to a resaying by characters and readers alike. Together such writing could be said to form a choral work arranged between independent participants communing in the present over the significance of the unfinished, perhaps unidentifiable, dialogues of the past: possibly encountering an immemorial past of human interaction, overflowing into present significance.

The preservation of the autonomy and separation of others is such that the world is lived between as well as within individuals; dialogue involves both an

⁸ Literature is elsewhere described as part of an ongoing “investigation” into the world which may therefore be understood as both part of society and of science. Levinas, *Altérité et transcendance*, intro. Pierre Hayat (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1995), p.129.

address and the possibility of a response. Bakhtin puts it in the following way, “For the author the hero is not ‘he’ and not ‘I’ but a fully valid ‘thou,’ that is, another and other autonomous ‘I’ (“thou art”).” (*PD*, p.63) Dialogic relationships cannot, therefore, be adequately expressed in the third party summary of the minutes of a meeting, but take place in the absolute present of a dialogue between an *I* and a *thou*, what Bakhtin calls life “on the threshold”. (p.61)⁹ Jacques Rolland, after Todorov, draws our attention to the Buberian inflection of this liminality.¹⁰ He then quotes from ‘Le Dialogue’, a late Levinas essay found in *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, to describe, in contrast to Buber, the absolute and asymmetrical distance between the *I* and the *thou*, which is at the same time the possibility of an opening, “séparés absolument par le secret inexprimable de leur intimité [...] sans commune mesure ni domaine disponible pour une quelconque coïncidence”. (*DVI*, p.221; *QDL*, p.23) Their intimacy is therefore constructed out of the absoluteness of the separation between the *je* and the *tu*, each “unique dans son genre”, since it is only because they are irreplaceable instances that they can enter into dia-logue without fusing – a dialogue “qui transcende cette distance sans la supprimer”. (*Ibid.*) It is this absolute distance or separation which Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky.

It is worth, however, clarifying Bakhtin’s and Levinas’s respective views on language, before continuing the comparison begun by Rolland and looking more closely at artistic language and genre in particular. Neither Bakhtin nor Levinas is thinking of a simple interpersonal space between defined discourses and interlocutors. Each instead develops ideas on interlocution from a position of separation, in which the confluence of ‘innumerable semantic streams’¹¹ assembles being in its entirety between different subjects in communication. For Bakhtin, the dialogic relationships drawn in language are not graspable through a

⁹ See also Shatov’s address to Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, “...we are two beings and have come together in infinity... for the last time in the world.” (*PD*, p.177; *QDL*, p.252)

¹⁰ The link is made by Todorov in *Mikhail Bakhtine: le principe dialogique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1981). *QDL*, p.24.

¹¹ “[...] au confluent de fleuves sémantiques innombrables”. *HdH*, p.20. Except where otherwise stated, quotations given in single quotation marks are my English translations, provided for reasons of euphony, and are followed by the original French in the note, except where a common and identical term is used in near isolation.

diagrammatic awareness alone of their multifaceted form. Compositionally speaking linguistics can envisage dialogic speech. However, its specific nature takes place between the rejoinders in a dialogue, and not directly in the utterances themselves. This can be illustrated by the dialogism already at work in the narrator's language, which may operate through the removal of the quotation marks surrounding different subject positions, acting so as to meld different discourses, and so create encounters.¹² This may equally take place in what is apparently a single voice, when Dostoevsky's narrator also fulfils the function of a character, as in *Notes from the Underground*, a technique also to be found in Genet's novels. For Bakhtin:

Dialogic relationships are extralinguistic. [...] They must clothe themselves in discourse, become utterances, become the positions of various subjects depicted in discourse, in order that dialogic relationships might arise among them. (*PD*, p.183)

For Levinas, as for Bakhtin, the space between interlocutors and interlocutions is of a special kind. The *Je* and *Tu* cannot be considered as objects taken generally, as the language used in their encounter predates the experience of this encounter. Language precedes designated contents and is, at once, “la distance absolue et la relation du dialogue plus ancienne que toute distinction des termes dans n’importe quelle conjonction.” (*DVI*, p.222) In a similar way for Bakhtin, genre is simultaneously a place of meeting with certain rules, and something permanently evolving in contemporary discourse. For Bakhtin, therefore, dialogism is extra-

¹² In ‘Dialogue sur le dialogue’, Jean-Luc Nancy addresses the observation to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe that in the theatre there is no narrator, as there is in the novel, to act as intermediary or to guide the staging, but only stage directions. If one takes the names of the *dramatic personae* as the most basic of stage directions, then it is from these positions that the separation between subjects must be imagined, and from which the play must be produced. “[L]es noms fixent une topologie des présents tandis que le texte [that is the novel] proprement dit opère la présentation de ces présents (ce qu’on attendrait comme leur socio/psycho/onto-logie [...]).” This topological relationship in dialogue is fundamental to separation and liminality in expression. In *Un nouveau partage des voix*, Vol. 1 *Dialogismes*, Conference proceedings, 24-27 March 2004 l’Université Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle, texts compiled by Jean-Pierre Sarrazac and Catherine Naugrette. p.81.

linguistic, but only traceable once clad in utterance or genre, while for Levinas, an encounter with the exterior producing an address is already language, and swarms with dialogic interaction preceding utterance¹³:

Le langage ne serait pas là pour *exprimer* les états de conscience; il serait l'événement spirituel sans pareil de la transcendance et de la socialité auquel tout effort d'expression – tout vouloir communiquer un contenu pensé – déjà se réfère. (p.223)

It is therefore only from a position of separation that sociality is possible, in which a “vouloir communiquer” precedes the *vouloir-dire*, such that the act of expression comes before any agreement as to what meaning means. The question of genre and multi-voicedness examines precisely the production of meaning through different kinds of address. The author's familiarity with various kinds of language and views on the world allows several subject viewpoints to be made to resonate in a single image, such that “[t]he image becomes polysemic, like a symbol”, and may “live different lives in different epochs.” (*DI*, p.410)

It is important to emphasize that for Bakhtin the problem of prose is “double-voicedness”, and for poetry it is “poetic ambiguity”. (p.328) These positions oppose one another in Bakhtin, but do share a point of contact in the symbolic, which will, however, require some unraveling. For Bakhtin double-voicedness creates semantic tension in “dialogic resistance” between separate, shared and conflictual resonations of meaning within a single utterance. This creates a density of meaning in prose which Bakhtin states can behave like a symbol. For Bakhtin, however, this is only *like* a symbol, and not actual symbol, as for him, the polysemy to be found in a poetic symbol cannot be multi-voiced or multi-accented, and “cannot presuppose a fundamental relationship to another's word, to another's voice.” (p.328) Genet's ambiguous comparisons owe

¹³ In William Golding's novel *The Inheritors*, the Neanderthal protagonists speak through a kind of telepathy whereby language precedes utterance. William Golding, *The Inheritors* (London: Faber, 1955). The dialogic relationship between the Grand Inquisitor and Christ in *The Brothers* is also of particular interest, as Christ does not pronounce a word.

something to the symbolists in their obscure codification; metaphor opens into metaphor to the point at which the chains of double-voices quickly become unrecognisable to one another, and cross the reader's interiority as though independent of the profane world of communication, emanating from the solitary and unique interiority of the poet. As Bakhtin writes, "The polysemy of the poetic symbol presupposes the unity of a voice with which it is identical, and it presupposes that such a voice is completely alone within its own discourse." (*DI*, p.328) While this is certainly reductive, such a position forms the premise for one of Genet's wagers with the reader; the one in *Journal du voleur*, that any attempt at his artistic reeducation would result in the educator being won over themselves. (*LM*, p.133; *JV*, pp.207-208) This is because the symbolic comparisons made, although they could not be considered as straightforwardly true, resonate nonetheless with being and its other occupants strewn throughout the oeuvre, and produce other meanings through other genres. Bakhtin continues, "As soon as another's voice, another's accent, the possibility of another's point of view breaks through this play of the symbol, the poetic plane is destroyed and the symbol is translated onto the plane of prose." (*DI*, p.328) The will to situate the symbolic-poetical outside prose and dialogism, conceiving of it as a closed lyrical self, is peculiar to Bakhtin, though he nevertheless points out the route followed for language to penetrate heteroglossia generally. We do not have time here for a full discussion of the novelisation which Bakhtin later comes to associate with successful non-prose works; however, he does provide us with a framework for discussing transgeneric shift, which will help to illuminate Genet's oeuvre. (p.7)

Genet's ideas on drama appear at this dividing point between a solitary poetic self and one in dialogue with the world. In *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs*, Genet describes the movement from a symbolic tragic drama, founded in the ritualistic repetition of a solitary past, to a dramatic one in dialogue, engaging the writer in the meaning of a living present:

au fur et à mesure que ma vie entraînait dans le révolu, je l'ai dramatisée.
Éliminant ce qui fut espièglerie, légèreté, gaminerie, je n'ai conservé que

les éléments qui sont proprement du drame: la Peur, le Désespoir, l'Amour triste ... et je m'en délivre qu'en déclamant ces poèmes convulsés comme le visage des sibylles. Ils laissent mon âme clarifiée. Mais si l'enfant dans lequel je crois me revoir rit ou sourit, il rompt le drame qui s'était élaboré et qui est ma vie passé, quand j'y songe; il détruit, le fausse, tout au moins parce qu'il apporte une attitude que le personnage ne pouvait pas avoir; il déchire le souvenir d'une vie harmonieuse (bien que douloureuse), m'oblige à me voir devenir un autre et, sur le premier drame, en greffe un second. (ND, p.195)

The gaze of the boy has caused Genet to change genre. The critical open-endedness of this passage transfers the poetic ambiguity of his lyrical writing to the shared semantic space of prose. However, he does not stop there, but moves from prose form to drama as he comes into proximity with another. This drama nourished by prose describes the passage of language from a symbolism peculiar to the poet, to a polysemy in which the other's participation has become a direct element in the generation of meaning. This is consonant with Bakhtin's late appreciation of the dialogism of theatre, which he had described in the 1920s as "subordinated wholly to the higher, ultimate authority of the author" (PD, p.188); and in the 1930s as of a single "unitary language". (DI, p.405) This single voice or world is not, for all that, quite the autism with which Bakhtin describes poetry, where "a voice is completely alone within its own discourse" (p.328); although he does not think poetry in terms of live, organic exchange. In 'Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences', however, Shakespearian theatre is described "as a sequential transformation of all reality that affects the heroes into the semantic context of their actions, thoughts and experiences", expressed either through words or "translated into the language of the interpretive potential word."¹⁴ These lines from 1974 echo an internal review from 1971 of his friend L.E. Pinsky's book on Shakespeare, which argues for a *theatrum mundi* springing

¹⁴ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* (Texas: Texas University Press, 1986), p.164.

from “that special significance [...] to each image, each action, and each word in Shakespeare’s tragedies [...]” He goes on, “the main thing is the perception (or, more precisely, the living sense unaccompanied by any clear awareness) of all action in the theater as some kind of special symbolic ritual.” (p.171) The symbolic may thus penetrate normal language. While Bakhtin thinks this writing, as far as the theatre is concerned, died with the Bard, semantic context and interpretative word must necessarily be open in all times, and it is to this which Genet is exposed in the gaze of the boy, at a meeting point between the visible and the invisible, the ritualistic and the real. It is these contacts with the exterior, however brief, which move Genet’s images from sometimes being irreducibly obscure, multi-faceted symbols, to repositories of resonance with the world at large.¹⁵

The bridging from symbol to polysemy in everyday interaction denotes a more direct relationship to heteroglossia than a purified, literary poetic language can provide, in which the reader is already alerted to a special symbolic identity. This is not however to say that such verbal performance, or such artistic language may not be accepted into language generally. What may at first have seemed a straightforwardly literal or material reality may quickly be assigned an alternative function, and be ‘irrealised’.¹⁶ The courtier-sonneteer starting from the flower

¹⁵ The entry of different voices into poetic ambiguity need not therefore be translated onto the level of prose, nor be covered in a “mantle of materiality” (*DI*, p.329), but instead lead to a broadening of polysemic effect. If one thinks of the ‘Shakespearean Rag’ (ll. 128-172) section to Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, however, Bakhtin’s argument against the dialogic character of poetry would seem to be partially born out. The pronounced change in voice and register between the narrator and the occupants of the cockney tavern endows their voices neither with any great prosaic autonomy, nor do they become aware of the poetic symbols elsewhere in the text. They therefore are not reinflecting or responding to symbols they are exposed to, but are behaving as a counterpoint to the narrator. While on the one hand the greater documentary and discursive back-up of prose can create a meta-critical layer showing that numerous subjects are interpreting the same reality differently, a multi-accented poetry is still possible, one which nonetheless remains symbolic. One has only to think of Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* as a poetic reworking simultaneously of the *Iliad*, the *Aeneid*, and *Paradise Lost*; and of a contemporary society scandal between the Petre and Fermor families. The available interpretative vocabulary is therefore very broad.

¹⁶ “Irréalisation”: see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Un théâtre de situations*, ‘L’acteur’, Gallimard/folio essais, Paris, (1973) 1992, p.215.

may long have drawn the comparison with verbal dexterity or female beauty, only later coining as part of his craft the idea of a ‘flower of rhetoric’, freeing it from its botanical content. As Bakhtin puts it, “A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way.” (*DI*, p.279) The flower may be a weed, the lady a tramp, and verbal dexterity used to violent ends, but in each case multiple subject positions, however unidentifiable, have been congregated, and been allowed to speak.

For Derrida, Genet himself is the flower of rhetoric, both flora, *genêt*, and fauna, *genet*, the small breed of Spanish racehorse. (*Glas*, 43b) He is also both signatory and character – or more properly, object of his own account. (20b) In the following quotation, Derrida accuses Sartre of dealing far too quickly with the argument of the rhetorical value of the flower:

la question de savoir pourquoi la fleur est, comme dit Sartre, « l’objet poétique par excellence » cette question fuit entre un méontologisme pré-heideggerien et un mallarméisme vague. On évoque la « disparition vibratoire » et la fleur absente de tous bouquets, « voilà toute la poésie de Genet ». (*Glas*, 21b; *StG*, pp.564-65)

We do, however, see the merit of Sartre’s anecdote in which Genet claims not to like flowers at all, “ce n’est pas la rose qu’il aime, c’est son nom” (*StG*, p.438); an anecdote in which the name supplies a concept, or several, for the object it denotes. For example, in *Miracle de la rose*, roses reconceptualise Harcomone’s chains by flowering there, setting off a chain of miracles of refiguration in language from the chain of flowers, of which Mairèad Hanrahan tells us “Il n’y a pas de miracle – ou de rose – central.”¹⁷ After an image of the crown of thorns, the most beautiful of the roses becomes the prefigurement of Harcomone’s beheading, cut by Genet using the nail scissors held by each prisoner once a month in turn. The prisoners are described as turning to face Harcamone like

¹⁷ Mairèad Hanrahan, *Lire Genet: Une poétique de la différence*, Montreal: Presses Universitaires de Montréal, 1997. pp.42-43.

sunflowers the sun, while we also remember the flower of the innocence of the girl Harcomone has murdered. (*MR*, pp.233-34) The name grafts itself with great readiness.

Derrida remarks in *Glas* that the strength of the flower image in Genet is to be found in its supplementary quality to the pre-existing plant. “La fleur est *partie*.” (*Glas*, 21b) It is interesting to note that in Japanese Nō theatre, the actor tries to reach an objective awareness of his art, the at once poetic and technical term for which is ‘the flower of the Nō’. The actor’s perfection of the flower endows the roles with an interiority come to light, or come from the light of the plant. As is noted in *Glas*, the flower in the context of Genet is at once an appendage, and at the same time an appearance of transcendence. (21b) The flower is always an acme of presence, condensed by the poet or actor. According to Genet’s poetic, as he remarks in one of his letters to Roger Blin, even abject attitudes or words “doivent émerveiller, toujours, étonner, toujours, par leur élégance et leur force d’évidence.” (*GOC4*, p.240)¹⁸

The disjunction possible in language between a word and its object may, therefore, already produce internal dialogism between voices, accents and inflections, creating a reconceptualisation of the object. The semantic drift caused by the multiplication of terms and metonymies means that the object may

¹⁸ In Nō theatre each character is a personality whose complexity and discreet presence, for Zeami, are each expressed in the flower, which undergoes constant changes. This goes for the Old man as much as for the Maiden. (p.12) The flower of the Nō, the perfection of which is the actor’s life’s work, is contiguous to the mystery of each character’s interiority from where it emanates. (p.77) “No matter what the role – whether the character be of high or low rank, a man, a woman, a priest or lay person, a farmer or a country person, even a beggar or an outcast – it should seem as though each were holding a branch of flowers in his hand.” (p.94) These interiorities are then related to one another through their substance rather than their function in the performance. (p.72) The flower is this substance, but always remains at one remove. One surmises, in reading the chapter ‘Mirror Held to the Flower’, that the mirror is that which reflects the actor’s figuration of the character, or his model of interpretation. It is not grasped in itself but is artistically proffered to the spectator. Its point of emanation once again is mysterious, and should allow an experience of the individual within reality generally. “The following might be said concerning making judgements: forget the specifics of the performance and examine the whole. Then forget the performance and examine the actor. Then forget the actor and examine his inner spirit. Then, forget that spirit, and you will grasp the nature of the *nō*.” (Zeami, *On the Art of Nō Drama, The Major Treatises of Zeami*, trans. Thomas Rimer, Yamazaki Masakazu, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.102. This multi-layered vision separates the audience member at each stage from the mere external physicality of the performance.

therefore become a desubstantivated source of polysemy. It is this that poetic ambiguity seeks to recreate in microcosm. Poetic ambiguity, while not emulating the verisimilitude of ordinary language, cannot simply be subsumed into Bakhtin's imputed "single-personed hegemony" (*DI*, p.297) of the poet. Indeed this is the difference between polysemy, at the interface between different ascribable worlds, and dissemination, which is a fragmentary explosion of different pollens, names, voices and signatures.¹⁹ The sonnet cycle with its evolving image repertoire and array of characters is a good example of a literary language which is at once reified and linked to discourse generally, as the difference between signifier and meaning is addressed generally in the linguistic community. Linguistic phenomena are not, to quote Shakespeare's sonnet 94, "the lords and owners of their faces".²⁰ To determine what has been written is up to the interpretation of the reader, like the flower of rhetoric, which is opened to interpretation and so may change meaning.

As Mallarmé describes in 'Crise de vers', the engenderment of an idea may be quite separate from the object from which it is produced, springing not from a physical or moral association, but instead a 'musical' one. Having forgotten the contours of a real flower, we are told, "en tant que quelque chose d'autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l'absente de tous bouquets."²¹ The 'same smooth idea' of the flower has produced something which cannot be found in a bouquet.

But does this mean that two objects can be suffused with the same semantic glow without disturbing an outward limpid sense of logicity? There is after all a great difference between what 'is' and what something may be figured 'as'. In the polyvalent play of figures it is difficult to distinguish sense and its

¹⁹ "Perdre la tête, ne plus savoir où donner de la tête, tel est peut-être l'effet de la dissémination." Derrida, *La dissémination* (Paris: Seuil/Points Essais, 1972), p.30. Thus dissemination takes over from polysemy.

²⁰ In an interview, Poirot-Delpech observes to Genet that he [Genet] has an innocent face. Genet insists that interpretation is different for each observer: "Je n'ai pas pris le visage de l'innocence. Si vous me dites que je l'ai, je l'ai. Si vous pensez que je ne l'ai pas, je ne l'ai pas. Mais j'aurai davantage de plaisir si vous me disiez que je l'ai et si vous pensiez que je l'ai." *ED*, p.241.

²¹ Mallarmé, 'Crise de vers', *Igitur, Divagations, Un coup de dés*, ed. Bertrand Marchal, *Poésie*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), p.259.

intermediaries, as they are inseparable. In this way one can say that the flower as a being releases a semantic glow from being itself. The effort to think being directly dispels metaphor, because as Llewelyn explains, it causes “beings [to] disappear and with them the direct literal and indirect metaphorical presence to beings.” (GE, p.175) In *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger interprets the Hölderlin poem ‘Bread and Wine’, saying that the line “words like flowers” should not be understood as a metaphor, as this would lead the reader to become bogged down in metaphysics, by causing a being (*Seiendes*) to eclipse Being (*Sein*). (OWTL, p.100) “Words like flowers” is not a comparison of Being with flowers, which are already familiar to us, but for Heidegger, “the awakening of the largest view”. (*Ibid.*) He quotes another version of Hölderlin’s verse, “Long and hard is the word of this coming but / White (Light) is the moment.” (*Ibid.*) But this white light, one objects, is no more describable than Being. The plant and the flower it produces, however, provide an intermediary. The absence from bouquets in Mallarmé, and from herbaria in Hölderlin – which is related to *Entziehung* (withdrawal) in Heidegger, and *retrait* in Derrida – are, therefore, to quote Llewelyn, at best “quasi-metaphor[s]”, subject to “the quasi-condition of metaphorical discourse about entities”. In other words, they are certainly comparisons: to something not already known, perhaps to something of a larger, if not the “largest”, view, but nonetheless comparisons. (GE, p.175) In *Glas*, Derrida reworks this quasi-metaphoricity: the flower is “la figure des figures” (*Glas*, 21b), at once recognisable and yet not yet inventoried, like the flower of the Nō which, although instantly recognisable, is not indicative of one thing in particular, but instead of a breadth of existence.

In the case of Genet, or rather *genêt*, the flower is a metaphor of metaphor, both a figure, a figure for the maker of figures, and a figure for figuration. If we were temporarily to call this a symbolic relationship, it is worth pointing out that it is at the same time real for the subject, who has undergone the play of figures creating polysemic effect, such that the subject is not thinking by metaphor, but appropriating meaning through language which itself exists within metaphor. Having been real for the poet and then for the reader, it is possible for a

“symbolic” discovery to enter verbal orchestration with other discourses and exercise a real, yet semantically disruptive, influence through dissemination. Mallarmé cannot sit on the tiers in a musical concert without anticipating, through this experience, future discoveries, “sans percevoir parmi l’obscur sublimité telle ébauche de quelqu’un des poèmes imminents à l’humanité [...] d’autant plus compréhensible que tu”.²² This means that the “absent” is also “immanent”, in the sense of impending. This effect of a partial penetration into communal comprehensibility, which at the same time remains incompletely enunciated or absent, shows that obscurity is part of linguistic structure, corresponding to the spaces crossed in the forms of address, used to receive or impart meaning in the assembly of being. If poetry is born in a genealogical line, at once generic and unique, like Bakhtin’s idea of utterance, then ambiguous or anomalous meaning may register within a multi-universed interaction, and require the interpretation of form and content dynamically. Thus, to return to our earlier quotation from Levinas, the effort of ‘objectivation as society’ works analogously in the symbolic and in the real. (*DHH*, p.188) Neither would this be a concludable activity of encoding and recoding, as this would imply a finished society. For these reasons, we consider the symbolic and the dialogic to be mutually illuminating in the appropriations they allow within the quasi-metaphorics of language, and remark that although the dialogic may lap at the symbolic, the symbolic is not at the same time drawn all the way into heteroglossia, but remains semantically disruptive and irreducible.

We shall now look at symbolic instances of language in Dostoevsky’s polyphony as a prelude to similar instances in the less narrative work of Genet. In the musical relation we have just examined, the object itself cannot be identified by Mallarmé or the occupants of the other tiers of the auditorium; what is more, the transference of thought to word is different for each contemplator. As the music is appreciated, the assembled ears attempt to listen for the ‘poem imminent to humanity’, that is its transfer into shared language, which Mallarmé describes

²² Mallarmé, ‘Crise de vers’, p.258.

later in the paragraph as “la transposition au Livre”.²³ This transposition from played music to proffered language is at this stage an address without a message.

Levinas’s idea of language as a ‘spiritual event’ is pertinent here (*DVI*, p.223); that is, the idea of language as prior to the transfer of any content, behaving not as a vehicle, but as address. However, consistent with a society of great diversity, the movement to language from music is achieved, Valéry tells us, through the objectivation of the slightest snatches of sense input:

Nous substituons une mélodie à un accord ou à une dissonance. Nous ajoutons à ce que nous avons ressenti et intuitivement formé ou vérifié – ce qu’il faut pour que ce produit psychologique immédiat soit négociable en valeurs linguistiques usuelles. Nous changeons nous-mêmes en monnaie *interhumaine* ce que notre « vie intérieure » c’est-à-dire *inhumaine, extra-humaine, subhumaine*, nous a produit...²⁴

It is from these pieces of input that the *en-deça de l’être* of primary sense impression is filled in by language, rendering these experiences malleable and opening them to exegesis, thus issuing in interhuman form what the subject experiences as the inhuman, the extra-human and the subhuman. Thus parallel possibilities swarm to and from the interhuman subject, who converts them in their turn into the language of exegesis.

I have discussed the reconceptualisation of objects emanating from the root of dialogic words, and the desubstantivation which attends the symbolic. I would now like to observe their point of contact, starting with a relatively trivial example in Madame Khoklakov from *The Brothers Karamazov*. She is both impressed and worried by the precocious comments of her daughter, Lise, who, remembering a conifer in her childhood garden comments, “I’ve such a vivid recollection of the pine as if I pined for it.” (*BK*, p.249) The musical bond of the original Russian ‘sosna’, to langour for, is homonymous with the expression ‘so

²³ Mallarmé, ‘Crise de vers’, p.258.

²⁴ Paul Valéry, ‘Fragments des Marginalia’, *Commerce*, 14, (Winter, 1927), 14-42 (p.28).

sna', meaning 'to be hardly awakened'. This is felicitously reproduced by Magarshack's *pine-pined*. The play on words, therefore, between the dreamlike memory and the remembered non-human object seems to threaten the kindred bond between mother and daughter, as her interiority spirals asymmetrically out of reach of simple logic or motherly attentiveness. Lise will later move from this kind of poetic languor to delirium as she ceases to be the mistress of her interhuman life.

In Genet, at the trial of his character Notre-Dame-des-fleurs, the boy is asked what first gave him the idea of murdering the old man. The defence he gives does not adhere to the rules of what one is usually considered free to think. He comes out with a *trope*, which is 'a turning' in a literal sense, not only of one thing into another in the conscious mind, but also in the sense of a physical torque: it was the old man's tie, he claims, seen as a garotte or tourniquet, which made him want to strangle. One could perhaps say, extending Mallarmé's desubstantivation of the flower, that the 'same suave idea' of the tie had attained a musical structure and cinesthetically behaved as a prompt.²⁵ It is in this sense that Levinas argues that meaning comes before the objects which they illuminate, be they human or non-human. Meaning precedes particular uses to which it is applied and does not belong to one more than to another, as essences gathered in one context can be reevoked in another. This is the danger of art as Levinas describes it in 1948 in 'La Réalité et son ombre', to which we shall return in considerable detail. However, in 1964 in 'La signification et le sens', he explains that, "le rayonnement ne caractérise pas plus authentiquement une journée de mai qu'un visage de femme." (*HdH*, p.22) As with the old man's tie, an object participating in being with a subject may lead to a structure or semantic confluence being discovered for the reconceptualisation or musical transformation of the object. In this way, Levinas explains, referring to a Homeric comparison of rock and human resistance, the figure is not necessarily anthropomorphic, but instead petromorphic. (*Ibid.*) In the same way, we could say that for Baudelaire,

²⁵ See also the murder scene of Joachim in *Querelle*, which is described in musical-floral terms highly reminiscent of 'Crise de vers'. (*ImQU*, p.238)

evil is not primarily human, but floral. The relation between figurative and literal senses may come out of kilter. Genet, in common with Mallarmé, addresses something absent from any flower, and indeed confesses to not even liking them. (*StG*, p.438) Poetic identity may therefore be said to show the asymmetry of interhuman, dialogical, and symbolic relations.

2. Intersubjective space and the Other

Even though the books of our study are objectively finished (bound and published), the absolute distance between writer and oeuvre, reader and text, world and its rendering, provides insights into the possibilities of intimacy between interlocutors described by Levinas in 'Le Dialogue'. These dialogues always leave the impression of having been interrupted or rather that they derive their meaningfulness from an influence that is incomplete because still devolving from the other. A parenthesis in the Levinas passage addressing Buber quoted above identifies the importance of the discretion with which the distance between the self and the other is brooked but remains intact: "secret inexprimable de l'autre pour moi, secret auquel, à tout jamais, je n'accède que par l'appresentation, mode d'exister de l'autre comme autre". (*DVI*, p.221) Thus, through 'appresentation', a *self-conscious experience* may take place whereby the implicit in the unknown other may come meaningfully to the fore, as though arising from the blind spots or walking from the ruins of the subject's own representation of them. Literature could be said, therefore, to prepare experiences for the reader, starting from the implicit, which may lead to discoveries out of phase with the 'lucidity of the intellect'.²⁶ This preparatory nature of literature may also show us that the self-conscious experience of the other in real life may begin even before

²⁶ In 'La Ruine de la représentation', Levinas criticises "une histoire des idées où le concept d'actualité coïncidait avec l'état de veille absolu, avec la lucidité de l'intellect." (*DHH*, p.181)

an actual encounter has occurred, or be the experience of an encounter before any mutually intelligible content has been communicated.²⁷

Levinas argues for the need to alter slightly the Buberian terminology used to describe the absolute distance between individualities by concentrating on a discrepancy in the mode of address which, Levinas claims, should not be in the form of a familiar *thou*, whereby one already has equality or acquaintance, for intersubjective space is curved and asymmetrical, not linear and reciprocal. Thus the exchange is not between a *je* and *tu*, but between a *je* and *vous*. The polite or plural form outweighs the singular *I* form, and accounts for the overweening need in Dostoevsky's characters to address the other, as though appearing before a superior or before a diverse and judging humankind.²⁸ This even applies across what were, until the Emancipation of the Serfs (1861), feudal class divisions.²⁹ Bakhtin's use of Buber, therefore, finds a further development in Levinas's description of the experience of the other as structurally important to the self.

This does not, however, mean that the self is always aware of or responsive to this role of the other and, in spite of this possible interdependency, Dostoevsky's characters seem through everything that befalls them to remain defiantly themselves, as though in some way buffered against the world and its other occupants. For Levinas this quality is characteristic of the knowing subject's ability to apply its knowledge and understanding, giving it "le pouvoir de se trouver toujours derrière ce qui [lui] arrive". (*DEE*, p.78) And yet, they also have a mania for communicating this consistency to others, as though their self-knowledge contained an uncertainty. Whether it be Rashkalnikov's theories on the sovereignty of the exceptional man, or Svidrigaylov's belief in the ultimate seducability of any woman (*CP*, p.486), they are all witness to the burning will to exteriorise and even succeed in meeting characters with whom they are partnered

²⁷ "[L]e langage est un parler-à avant d'être un parler-de; il est exposition à un autre avant d'être communication d'un contenu." (*QDL*, p.28)

²⁸ The following extreme minimalist example of asymmetry is found in *The Possessed*, as Shatov addresses Stavrogin: "'Our' conversation didn't take place at all; there was a teacher, uttering big words and a pupil, who had arisen from the dead." (*PO*, p.253-254; *QDL*, p.28)

²⁹ It is also worth remembering that in the *Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, Genet comments on miniscule figures sunk into feudal bases, leaving the statues at once wholly individual and grounded in pedestals many times their own mass. (*AT*, p.67)

in relation to an idea, to whom they are seemingly drawn because they complicate the process of intentionality – Rashkalknikov is drawn deep into discussion of his article by the detective pursuing him; Svidrigaylov touches on subjects in conversation with the brother of the woman he is trying to seduce, going far beyond the necessities of the blackmail on which he is already embarked.³⁰ It is as though they cannot refuse the challenge of justifying their behaviour to another who might have a very different view on their undertaking; as though, propelled by their own words, this were the only way of maintaining their perception. This attraction seems to come from the other's resistance as an independent singularity out of the subject's reach, one which could lead to a meaningful rethink or shakedown of themselves. This would seem to imply that the self is always, as Husserl puts it in his *Cartesian Meditations*, “gros d'un 'plus' qui s'étend au-delà”,³¹ making the subject susceptible to dialogic relations, in the same way that *méta-phore* in ‘La signification et le sens’ is carried beyond primary content. (*HdH*, p.17)

In the next section of this chapter, we shall see how the secret intimacy with the other on the personal level seems to run parallel to the tracing of meaning and influence between texts on a trans-literary level – as though the language and texts we are examining were “gros d'un plus” as well, with one referential object concealing another. Therefore, just as the subject is sometimes forced beyond the self, so, it would seem, is the reader on encountering poetic effects which refer outside the confines of the original text. Failure to notice these would, as Bakhtin comments, turn ‘stylization’ into simple ‘style’, and ‘irony’ into ‘bad art’, by transcribing what are in fact dialogic inflections onto a single level. (*PD*, p.185) Valéry makes a very similar point in his annotated translation of extracts from Edgar Allan Poe's ‘Marginalia’ when he emphasizes the horizontal associations that should be stimulated in the reader by the text, thus sounding different notes in another's soul:

³⁰ Svidrigaylov even hints to Dunya that he poisoned his wife, though perhaps in the hope of creating an isolating criminal complicity. (*CP*, p.507)

³¹ *DHH*, p.180, Edmond Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, trans. from German Gabrielle Peiffer and Emmanuel Levinas, (Paris: Vrin, 1999), p.40.

La valeur d'un ouvrage pour un lecteur donné est mesurée par l'importance de ces réactions parallèles à la lecture. L'ouvrage peut, en définitive, être jugé fort mauvais; si les notes en question ont été nombreuses et explicites, la valeur excitante du livre est démontrée.³²

If for Valéry the power of a text is measurable by its ability to produce other texts in the reader, then the “gros d'un plus” can be understood in the generative sense of nascent alterity. Texts “imminents à l'humanité”³³, as Mallarmé said above, are therefore in a mercurial musical relation to their sources, as polyphony leads to polysemy and dissemination, generated by undecidability, irony, reinflection, and stylization, in the creation of new meanings. As Valéry states, “Le sujet d'un ouvrage est à quoi se réduit un mauvais ouvrage.” (*VO2*, p.679) Generally speaking, therefore, what is judged to be ‘bad art’ may be down to the reader for not being receptive to the parallel stimuli of stylization and reinflection, or it can be down to the writer who has overdetermined their subject. To know the subject of a text is to be able to delimit the enclosure describing otherness, and therefore to fix its alterity through definition. The opening of the hermetic text to others also bespeaks the opening of the reader's self to the other in heteroglossia.

Bataille is also sensitive to this contiguity with others in heteroglossia, and writes in his essay on Genet in *La littérature et le mal*:

[J]'ai cette certitude: l'humanité n'est pas fait d'êtres isolés, mais d'une communication entre eux [...]. [N]ous baignons dans la communication, nous sommes réduits à cette communication incessante dont, jusque dans le fond de la solitude, nous sentons l'absence, comme la suggestion de possibilités multiples, comme l'attente d'un moment où elle se résout en un cri que d'autres entendent. Car l'existence humaine n'est en nous, en

³² Valéry, ‘Fragments des Marginalia’, p.20.

³³ Mallarmé, ‘Crise de vers’, p.258.

ces points où périodiquement elle se noue, que le langage crié, que spasme cruel, que fou rire, où l'accord naît *d'une conscience enfin partagée* de l'impénétrabilité de nous-mêmes et du monde. (LM, pp.148-49, my emphasis)

Moments when communication does not function, and when the unintelligible gains the upper-hand, are intolerable for consciousness, and have an isolating effect; but this may also stir the possibility of a 'consciousness at last shared'. Later on, Bataille proceeds to locate the feeling of communion in shared crisis with the Other in the pain of being itself, and claims that "la conscience d'être est le scandale de la conscience" (p.150). The 'scandal of consciousness' is highly reminiscent of Levinas's concept of saturation in being, the *il y a*, but seems to open the simultaneous possibility of a beyond being in relation to the Other. The scandal of being is something which, when faced by the individual or society in recognition that being is not the only human register, is capable of producing *désintér-esse-ment* – even though there is also the possibility of exaltation in the difficulty and injustice occasioned by being. Levinas also points out in *De l'oblitération* that in modern philosophy the divine tends to receive artistic rather than religious expression. (OBL, p.28) This would seem to concur with what Bataille says about the relationship sought by society with the scandal of being: "nous maintenons avec le scandale qu'à tout prix nous voulons soulever, auquel néanmoins nous tentons d'échapper – un lien indéfectible, mais le moins douloureux que nous pouvons, en l'espace de la religion ou de l'art (de l'art qui hérita une partie des puissances de la religion)." (LM, pp.150-51) This view of religion, however, includes a pronounced tendency towards theodicy, the reconciliation of a beneficent God with an imperfect world in the minimisation of suffering for the greatest number, something which we shall examine more at the end of this chapter. If a certain view of religion seeks to attenuate the pain of being by offering cosmogonies, explanations, and views of the self in the grand scheme, art may occupy a similar access for man to an impenetrable world. The scandal of being in relation to which man seeks to position himself, for Bataille,

may show at the same time a kind of ambiguous appeal, as it belongs to the privileged moments of communication which approach the ineluctable aspects of human existence.

The aesthetic aspect of scandal and misfortune is a manner in which being is made resonant. We take an example from *Crime and Punishment*. Rashkalnikov keeps himself up late turning over his misfortunes in his mind, bringing rejoinders from his mother, sister, Marmeladov, and Luzhin into his internal dialogue, tightening the screw on his ability to understand and act: "So he kept torturing himself, tormenting himself with these questions, and he seemed even to derive some pleasure from it." (CP, p.63) Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* provides another example. He collects a catalogue of moral aberrations within civilised society, which may provide aesthetic pleasure, not least to him, as they enable his theological musings. However, in their scandalous unintelligibility, they leave him entirely unsure of how to act, and leave him prey, however secretly, to Rashkalnikov's analogous state of rebellion. (Book V, Chapter 3) Whereas Ivan and Rashkalnikov's aesthetic reactions to the scandal of being are each on the point of creating disinterestedness, their intervention makes matters worse. If, as Bataille observes, religion also seeks to provide a regulative link to the scandal of consciousness, then arguably a digression into an only apparently alternative register, the spiritual, could equally lead, through mystification, to an intensification of being. This is a risk that arouses ire in critics of organised religion. However, as Zossima observes in *The Brothers Karamazov*, when the spiritual world is rejected, it may also be "dismissed with a sort of triumph, even with hatred." (BK, p.369) This leads later in the novel not to the defence of another within being, but to a kind of exaltation at the ravages of being upon others. When Zossima dies, rather than remaining incorrupt, his body begins to stink, and there results a general excitement at the fact that he does not provide an exception to shared fate.

The unbelievers were delighted, and as for the believers, there were some among them who were even more delighted than the unbelievers themselves [...] (BK, p.387)³⁴

The scandal of being is tacitly approved, therefore, by altered aesthetic and religious sensibilities.

It is the very same solution to scandal that Bataille perceives in Genet's novels, whereby the cause of suffering is presented in aestheticised form as a solution, in which solipsism is proposed as a cure for indifference, fate used to inure to the arrows of fortune, and masochism proposed as an answer to violence. This may amount to the temptation towards a deliberate transgression against the Good in an expression of sovereignty, a thinking which is outlined in the following way by Bataille, "je suis *au-dessus* de l'essence: je fais ce que je veux, je me fais ce que je veux...". (LM, p.147) However, the aim of being "*au-dessus de l'essence*" is not, to use more Levinasian terminology, the same as the "*au-delà de l'essence*"; it is an "*être autrement*" rather than an "*autrement qu'être*", that is to say an attempted indifference, rather than disinterestedness exceeding the subject through heterology. (AQE, p.3, AQEb, p.13) Bataille quotes in a footnote the following observation from Sartre's *Saint Genet*:

Si le criminel [...] a la tête solide, il voudra jusqu'au bout demeurer méchant. Cela veut dire qu'il bâtera un système pour justifier la violence: seulement du coup celle-ci perdra sa souveraineté. (LM, p.130)³⁵

The personal bet is to see whether it is possible through a kind of misrule to assert one's liberty in a hostile, impenetrable world, by which the usual order of the world may be sustainably inverted and its morality suspended. Bataille will attribute a 'classic attitude' to Genet, which could also easily have been derived

³⁴ Bakhtin explains in his 1961 notes on Dostoevsky, in highly Levinasian manner, that "a miracle would have enslaved". (PD, p.298)

³⁵ Bataille gives the *StG* reference as p.223, which is in the original edition that has 579 pages. In the more widely available edition, which has 692 pages, it is on p.267.

from Rashkalnikov, a sovereign who claims a right to both recognition and tribute from the social world:

L'exemple de Genet répond exactement à l'attitude classique en ce qu'il chercha la souveraineté dans le Mal, et que le Mal, en effet, lui donna ces moments vertigineux où il semble qu'en nous, l'être est disjoint, et où, bien qu'il survive, il échappe à l'essence qui le limitait. (p.152)

This founding violence, violently maintained, is presented as an illusory independence, which few of Dostoevsky's or Genet's characters survive mentally or physically unscathed. Fear of failure need not discourage the most daring, outrageous and self-destructive acts. In fact, Kirilov, in *The Possessed*, plans to escape altogether the limitations of being by committing suicide; Ippolit too, in *The Idiot*, attempts to overcome his moral disappointments, and a body weakened by consumption, by taking his own life. (*ID*, p.459, Book 3, Chapter 5-7)

Many of Dostoevsky's heroes find themselves struggling with the doomed effort of finding self-fulfilment already within the confines of the self. The narrator of *The Brothers Karamazov* explains in Book One that this abortive undertaking is avoided by the religious novice, who instead of seeking sovereign self-affirmation, seeks instead to renounce his will in order to achieve

freedom from himself, and so escape the fate of those who have lived their whole lives without *finding themselves in themselves*. (*BK*, p.28, my emphasis)

This self-inflicted religious servitude to an elder could, as Dostoevsky points out, lead to abuse in a master-slave dynamic in which, as Bataille remarks, "son apparente souveraineté n'est alors que la volonté autonome de la servitude", (*LM*, p.144) – and upon which Genet styles his failures. This would be the position sought by humanity in relation to the Grand Inquisitor, surrendering itself to a tyrannical elder. The novice's hope tends instead towards election, in which

freedom is a freedom from the self, and a choseness for the other. Ivan and Rashkalnikov have created for themselves unusual heights of anguish in their attempts to find themselves in themselves. Rashkalnikov has asserted his will and committed murder in developing the hypothesis that the self may indeed rest upon itself, and that the rights of others may, under certain circumstances, be disregarded. In contrast, Ivan, at first far more calmly, asserts that without the idea of God to unify people, or a system of obligations, “all is permitted”. (p.78, 92, Book II, Chapter 6 and 7) They each prepare an article on their philosophical position or idea, as they each try to come up with an answer to division in the world: for Rashkalnikov, the exceptional man will not tolerate resistance and may be compelled to swim a river of blood for his self-expression, while for Ivan, it is only after the failure of belief in a divine unifying principle that the same conclusion is reached. Without a unanimous commitment to community in the love of man for mankind, people can only be ruled by force, by the *autos-da-fe* of ‘The Grand Inquisitor’ poem. Ironically, then, they both feel compelled to share their findings with others, producing a *cocktail détonnant* of simultaneous solipsism and sociality.

It is interesting to see to what extent these ideas are developed in the social environment. Rashkalnikov, in his article, (which is more of a manifesto when set next to Ivan’s muse), argues for the general social acceptability of his psychopathic belief, while Ivan wistfully asserts that tyrannical sovereign rights may already be inseparably part of a world which lacks regulative ethical principles. Rashkalnikov’s assertion will, however, return to haunt its author. The detective, Porfiry, has read the article, and can therefore interrogate the prime suspect by using the suspect’s own words and idea. Furthermore, as Rashkalnikov’s antisocial idea of the exceptional powers the exceptional man may grant himself becomes increasingly exteriorised, it becomes increasingly likely to bloom into an exchange in the present – which indeed happens: first through Rashkalnikov’s admission to Sonia, and then through his surrender to Porfiry. It seems that an anti-social thesis, initially developed in the social environment, but then nurtured in an individual subjectivity, may under special artistic or

diplomatic circumstances make a return to the social. After all, secretly harboured belief only becomes discourse upon contact with an exterior.

Dostoevsky's heroes tend to be obsessed by an idea that inhabits their character and it is this idea that forms their voice seeking an interlocutor. Thus even the solipsistic idea of mastery through what we might call 'self-discovery', and the assertion that the self rests upon itself, risks undergoing fission at the moment when the hero comes into proximity with others. This failed attempt to find oneself in oneself also precisely describes the split style of Genet's fictionalised biographical voice in his first five novels. He demonstrates, through the pursuit of a particular kind of Sainthood, the failed attempt to find himself in himself; a Sainthood which is neither traditional nor simply false: for through it, marginal or often invisible characters find their dramas carefully described. Genet both narrates, borrowing the points of view of his characters, and figures himself as a character. He is thus drawn between the detailed description of these others and their martyrism by his own, and by their own, hands. Divine's sainthood figured as a vent in Genet's barred throne-room is redolent of a mysterious dialogism between characters whose solipsistic view of the other seems only to furnish an interior, subjective landscape. Yet at the same time, in Genet's depiction, one interior landscape is made to furnish another's, and therefore constitutes the preamble to the spiritual event of address. In a way that is reminiscent of the paradox of Rashkalnikov, whose promised triumphant return to himself after the robbery leaves him instead in a state of obsessional need to address the other, Genet's narrator makes a virtue of failing to secure self-mastery. He then addresses himself to the Other in the reader, usually from a slum, prison or totalitarian environment, and claims, in spite of all, that everything has gone according to plan. If an idea-character such as Rashkalnikov has great difficulty admitting error, and drawing conclusions from his sneaking suspicions, then Genet uses an analogous movement by refusing, in almost all cases, any possibility of error. Genet does occasionally, however, gesture to the conceit of his writing, and indicates the limit of his powers and patience to evoke beauty within the prison environment. In *Miracle de la rose* Genet even expresses his

desire for revenge upon his fellow prisoners, “du mal qu’ils m’ont fait, de l’ennui que m’a causé leur inégalable bêtise.” (*MR*, p.220) For Bataille, in such a moment Genet undoes some of his most successful manoeuvres (*LM*, p.140), although such a view overlooks more tender demythologizing moments. In *Miracle de la rose*, Genet comments of his fellow prisoners, “Ils ne sont plus que l’outrageante caricature des beaux criminels que j’y voyais quand j’avais vingt ans”, and later evokes in something of a vigil on the unhappiness of those confined twenty years previously, “la douleur vraie, la peine lamentable de ces gosses courbés sur les champs de betteraves [...]” (*MR*, p.246, 362) The literary effect of a faulty or fissured narrative filled with traces allows the Genet environment also to become “gros d’un plus”, and opens the possibility that this *grossesse* may carry something completely different from that which its environment suggests.

In this movement, and with the other in view, Genet pitches his conceit against our expectations. The result is a kind of ghost writing, which makes the appearance and disappearance of the other a constantly evolving feature. We do not know whether they are real characters to whom we should feel attached or instead erotic fantasies drawn around the totem of the phallus. But to complicate matters further, the phallus, an interpretative centre based on power, and the other, the ex-centric placement of meaning, are only present by dint of writing, with the reality of neither guaranteed. Idea partners in Dostoevsky are drawn to one another precisely because they are dialogically other, in an interaction taking place before or beyond the Ego and the Same, *le Moi* and *le Même*, the enclosures of the individual and of the world which Levinas’s thought seeks to open.³⁶ In like manner, Genet’s poetics allows a certain rescuing from the Same: a rescuing from the sum of institutions, communities and discourses which, already alike, recognise one another, but in which the marginal other may easily become lost or go unrecognised, and therefore be refused dialogical opening. But most often Genet performs rescues from obscurity, only then to annex them, in a second movement, to himself.

³⁶ As in Levinas’s usage of *le Même* and *le Moi*, and *le Dire* and *le Dit*, in English they will sometimes be capitalised for reasons of emphasis.

To put it differently, Genet undoubtedly produces a movement in Desire from the Same to the Other by giving characters flesh; however, he very often describes them only to consign them, once more, to the preferences of his own ego. For example his mourning for Jean Decarnin first leads him to graft his friend's desire onto himself as envoy into the world, "Par mes yeux, il verra les étoiles, l'écharpe des femmes et leur sein." (*PF*, p.57) While this image is for Genet chastely erotic, he had already begun to transfer his affections to Riton the milicien, who is designated amongst the French enemies of the Resistance at random as responsible for Decarnin's death, that Genet explains himself to be "décidé à employer n'importe quel moyen pour me débarrasser de son souvenir", and that with regards to Riton "le meilleur tour à ce gamin, serait bien de le charger de l'amour que je portais à sa victime." (p.42) This sexual betrayal will lead to some of the more disturbing and prurient passages in the novel. So these manifestations of eros involve rescuing the other from the Same, to then assign them to the Self. Genet thus enables a comparison between an appropriative personal eros and an appropriative eros in the Same, as a way of justifying the order of the day. Decarnin is mourned by France as a resistant, but was killed by a French *milicien*. Hence Genet operates an alternation of conflictual desires for Decarnin through the use of a surrogate, which enables the interpenetration of equivocal ethical concerns. The grafting of the surrogate, Riton, is contrived as a way of helping Genet to displace his affections for Decarnin. It is as though the anarchic claim of alterity could be pushed to a safe distance through thematisation, as we quoted from Levinas above. Genet, however, only reproduces this distancing after the link of responsibility has already gained a hold on himself and the reader through Desire. Sole reliance upon thematisation is therefore subverted.

Genet's enterprise here is illuminated by the way Levinas distinguishes between philosophy in an idealist tradition, and the 'philosophy of eros'. Levinas thinks the philosophy of eros through the nature of desire and metaphysical desire

examined in *Phaedrus*³⁷, and also through the related argument on the good beyond being in the *The Republic*³⁸. Although previously, “[l]a philosophie [...] s’identifiait à l’absorption de tout ‘Autre’ à partir du ‘Même’ ou à la déduction de tout ‘Autre’ à partir du ‘Même’”, the phenomenological relation of phenomena to one another means that: “[...] désormais une relation entre le Même et l’Autre ne vient pas inverser l’éros philosophique.” (*DHH*, p.177) Thus encounters may be perceived as individual exchanges or events concerning the other, before becoming narratable results. This does not suggest a privileged link to truth, but an attentiveness to the events from which judgements are made. The movement from the Same to Other is frequently performed by Genet; in the case of Decarnin, and Divine, for example, as he sets them apart, respectively, from triumphant narratives of the Liberation, and amongst the characters of the Montmartre underworld. However, they are then bent to his own storytelling requirements. Genet thus manages to run concurrently a phenomenological gesture in encounters with alterities in the downtrodden not usually found in literature through philosophical eros, and simultaneously a movement from the *Même* to the *Moi*, reproducing in perverse form the repression and neutralisation of these same others in thematisation and the unitary view of totality.

This double movement is able to think both inside and outside dominant readings of the world by gesturing both to their outside, and to the way in which alterity is absorbed. It is a manner of both indicating parallel possibility, and its loss. Reading ‘Tout autrement’ (1973) in *Noms Propres*, Critchley remarks on the way Levinas salutes the “disruptive power” of Derrida’s deconstruction.³⁹ He does this in a fable set in the “no man’s land” of the 1940 exodus from Paris following the invasion, in which a hint of another time chiasmically crosses events:

³⁷ Plato, ‘Phaedrus’, *Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII*, trans. Walter Hamilton, (London: Penguin, 1973), *Phaedrus*, 237, (“Love is a kind of desire”), p.36. Levinas describes *Phaedrus* as one of the five most important books in the history of philosophy. (*Eel*, p.27)

³⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. A.D. Lindsay, (London: Everyman, 1976), *The Republic*, 509, (“the good is not itself being but transcends even being in dignity and power”), p.203.

³⁹ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.154.

En ces jours d'entre-temps, un épisode symbolique: quelque part entre Paris et Alençon, un coiffeur à moitié ivre invitait les soldats qui passaient sur la route – les «petits gars» comme il les appelait dans un langage patriotique planant au-dessus des eaux, ou surnageant dans le chaos – à venir se faire raser gratuitement dans son échoppe. Avec ses deux compagnons, il rasait gratis et ce fut aujourd'hui. La procrastination essentielle – la future *différance* – se résorbait dans le présent. Le temps arrivait à sa fin avec la fin ou avec l'intérim de la France. À moins que le coiffeur ne fut aussi délirant que la quatrième forme du délire du Phèdre où, depuis Platon, se tient le discours de la métaphysique occidentale. (NP, p.83)

The “demain on rasera gratis” is spoken in the sense, Critchley points out, of the English “It’s jam tomorrow”, or “That’ll be the day”; only this tomorrow alluded to *is* today.⁴⁰ Levinas, on the other hand, inserts a word of hesitation or caution, that perhaps the drunkenness of the half drunk barber was that described in Plato’s *Phaedrus* in which love is described as an extension to the fourth form of madness. Possession includes at once an elevation from the sensible to the intelligible realms, and from the physical to the metaphysical.⁴¹ It is philosophical eros, and may allow the Other to be distinguished in beauty. Beauty, however, may equally lead to possession of the beloved and move in the direction of the Same. This double reading is also to be found in Genet, and seems to refer ambiguously in places to the *Phaedrus* passage. Socrates describes the elevation of beauty by the growth of wings, as “the stump of each feather under the whole surface of the soul swells and strives to grow from its root”.⁴² Genet, in the passage in which he fails to absorb another into his own drama of moribund

⁴⁰ Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, p.153.

⁴¹ Critchley, *Ethics of Deconstruction*, pp.154-55.

⁴² *Phaedrus*, 251, p.58.

erotics alluded to above, is inspired in his reverie by the sight of two boys on a prison visit,

Quand ils sont passés devant moi, roulant leurs hanches et gardant bien droites leurs épaules, je voyais déjà à leurs omoplates la bosse des muscles, couvrant les racines de leurs ailes. (*ND*, p.195)

The wings are given to the beloved and not to the lover, as a sign of the beloved's independence. This unconfining image therefore goes out to the Other. However, it is also possible to find examples of an eros moving in the direction of the Same or the Ego in Plato, in which the beloved is worshipped "as if it were a god, and, if he [the lover] were not afraid of being thought an utter madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a divinity."⁴³ In Genet, such an idolatry can extend as far as implied human sacrifice, and in *Notre-Dame* Genet greets the sound of a German bomber, "oiseau de fer", from his cell with joy, while his cell mates bleat with fear: "Je vis, dis-je, ou crus voir un enfant de dix-huit ans dans l'avion, et du fond de ma 426 je lui souris d'amour." (*ND*, p.10.)

The ability to manipulate the other at a safe distance is not possible in this instance; and indeed, for this narrator, unconcerned with being thought mad, it is unimportant, as he claims to enjoy the idea of general suffering. The poetic effect, however, is to draw our attention to turnarounds in philosophical eros, in favour of a totality hostile to life. That this hostility should also threaten Genet's life highlights the abortive character of his disregard for the Other, the alternative he so illogically rejects, and in rebellion against whom he overcompensates in an indifference to all life.⁴⁴ As Rudi Visker explains:

⁴³ *Phaedrus*, 251, p.57.

⁴⁴ For a parallel example see George Jackson's description of an overheard conversation in which a deathrow prisoner argues in favour of the death penalty to a guard. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994), p.282.

the Other, Levinas seems to suggest, is precisely an *ethical* Other because he silently puts me before the question whether it is worthwhile to live a life that has to engage in a 'war' [of thematisation] in which it [death] always wins, in order not to engage in that 'inner' war [with being as expressed in the 'il y a'] which it will lose anyway. (*TaS*, p.257)

The war it wins is the absorption of the other in the recuperation of the self, while the 'inner' war takes place within its own existence, which takes itself for a substance rather than a verb, resistant to the *il y a* and to the other. Since the power, *pouvoir*, or "je peux" of the *conatus essendi*, will meet death, and the impossibility that accompanies it, then the Other should be preferable, as it leaves the subject's power and initiative intact, whilst at the same time making the subject responsible for it. (p.255) So the simple approach of the other may not be enough to rupture the *solus ipse*, but does at least place it in doubt. As the narrator in *The Brothers Karamazov* seems to imply, the attempt to find the other in the self risks finding the self in the self, in the perpetuation of the Ego, as the subject tries to lose itself in the exterior world, and so loosen the bonds that ache at its centre. Genet likes to play on the ambiguity of this encounter as the will of consciousness and its powers of exegesis are brought into play.

In illustration of this, let me return to the passage in the *The Brothers*, mentioned above, in which the self is found in the self. This passage illuminates and is illuminated by another in *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs* where Genet describes an inward sensitisation caused by the solitude of entering prison:

Après la monstruosité immonde de mon arrestation [...] la cellule de prison, que j'aime maintenant comme un vice, *m'apporta la consolation de moi-même par soi-même*. (*ND*, p.49, my emphasis)

This consolation of "moi-même par soi-même" would seem to be a derelict state of self-discovery. It is then complicated by inscriptions which are "gros d'un plus", and carry the reader on a would-be transcendent route through fellow-



suffering, as Genet's narrator derives courage from the knowledge of his shared lot:

Chaque fois nouvelle que je tombe, je cherche sur les murs les traces de mes précédentes captivités, c'est-à-dire de mes précédents désespoirs, regrets, désirs *qu'un autre détenu aura gravés pour moi [...]*. (*Ibid.*, my emphasis)

His wishing then begins to change pitch from a receptivity to the other, to a tailoring of the other to his own tastes:

je désire quelquefois avoir une amitié fraternelle, mais toujours pour un homme – de mon âge – qui serait beau, de qui j'aurais toute la confiance, qui serait le complice de mes amours, de mes vols, de mes désirs criminels [...]. (*Ibid.*)

The beauty of this other does not create a respectful distance, since he attributes to him a personality so similar to his own that it is on the point of merger with the self. He then annexes this other to himself outright, as the final resting place of his confidence and secrets:

J'attends sur le mur la révélation de quelque secret terrible: meurtre, surtout, meurtre d'hommes, où trahison d'amitié ou profanation des Morts, et dont je serais le tombeau resplendissant. (*Ibid.*)

So it turns out that the “gros d'un plus” is of himself, stillborn. He is on his own again after all, with his crimes filtered through emissaries that resemble him, before being enclosed once more in the sepulchre of himself. This return to the self is at odds with the triumphant return Hegel ascribes to deduction, by which “la conscience revient triomphalement à *elle-même pour reposer sur elle-même*.” (*DHH*, p.273, my emphasis) Rather than helping control the environment, it

seems that for Genet this condition is moribund and despairing. Genet frequently describes this curve of a movement away from the self and back again in its various declensions, and offers privileged insights into it in his ethico-aesthetic texts. We now turn to ‘Ce qui est resté d’un Rembrandt...’ (1967).

Genet describes the separated state occupied by people and objects depicted in art. Having described a feeling of uncanny contact with a fellow passenger in the train, he goes on to claim that the only ‘true’ experiences of his life had been gruelling self-consciousness surrounding moments of stress. But then a different kind of event in a look exchanged with a fellow passenger occurred. In the first case, danger or indignation fuelled the experience in an assertion of the self, whereas in the second, it is as though the self definitively loses its priority. Interestingly, Genet does not then insist that the exchange with the other, rather than the continuation of the self, is the truer experience. The full quotation clarifies the importance of the event:

avant tout je devais noter ceci: les seuls moments de ma vie que je pouvais tenir pour vrais, déchirant mon apparence et laissant à découvert... quoi? *un vide solide* qui ne cessait de me perpétuer? – Je les aurais connus lors de quelques colères très saintes, dans des trouilles également bénies, et dans le rayon – le premier – qui allait de l’œil d’un jeune homme au mien, dans notre regard échangé. (*CQR*, p.29)

His encounter with truth in the rediscovery of himself is described in the following way, “déchirant mon apparence et laissant à découvert...quoi? *un vide solide* qui ne cessait de me perpétuer?” He could be said, therefore, to have found *himself in himself*, but why does he consider this grimly described experience to be so true?⁴⁵ The inertia of the “vide solide” attempts to describe the impact of

⁴⁵ This anguish is different from the Sartrean identification of the other as a hole in the world. If in Sartre the other as a hollow limits my empire, in this Genetian example it is the self which is the lacunae, a solid lacunae, not so different from the above sepulchral description. Levinas insists on the ethical significance for the subject of the unknowability of the other, but doubts that dialectical momentum can be achieved from a starting point of nothingness: “Sartre di[sait] d’une façon

anger and fear on the subject (“colères”, “trouilles”). Perhaps these moments could be considered as true for the reason that they create a total will to escape: they involve crises which may be experienced at the same time as others, but from which the ego re-emerges alone in self-perpetuation. This self-perpetuation may, however, contain a trace of the other, glimpsed in crisis, as even though the self persists, it has been given an insight into its own imperfection. (*TeI*, p.56, *TeIb.*, p.82) The self may not necessarily forget the other it is unable to absorb, as this other represents something new in the idea of perfection or infinity, which on further reckoning “n’est pas idée, mais désir.” (*Ibid.*, *Ibidb*; *TaS*, p.260) Levinas, for his part, argues that suffering may provoke an outrageous feeling of hope that things might one day be Different, rather than the Same. (*DEE*, p.158) It can occasion an awakening from the conditions of normality and self-recognition that we might previously have considered to be perfectly natural. In order to examine this idea further, we must reflect on the subject’s experience of itself in the context of existence generally.

Both Genet and Levinas develop a similar conceptual vocabulary for treating self-perpetuation and its alternatives, and we shall compare them in the next section. In Levinas it is only the selfish subject able to enjoy itself in isolation that can be ethical, as following enjoyment, the relationship to being asserts itself once again, as Levinas argues in the section of *Totalité et infini* ‘La joie et ses lendemains’. (*TeI*, pp.116-18, *TeIb*, pp.152-54) If suffering may open into hope, and ‘joy’ into renewed dependency, then the ligature to the self can neither be permanently fixed nor undone. In Genet’s account of the continuation of the self after trauma on the occasion of his return to prison in *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs*, and his experiences of *colères très saintes* and *trouilles bénies*, the other is noticed both in hope and in dismay, solitude and society. The Genet narrator goes unendingly under the heading of an Ego, with a separate self providing a running

remarquable, mais en arrêtant l’analyse trop tôt, qu’Autrui est un pur trou dans le monde”; instead Levinas emphasizes that “Il [Autrui] procède de l’absolument Absent.” (*DHH*, p.276) Closer to the “vide solide” description is Levinas’s oblique return to the hole image in his book on Blanchot, describing the *il y a* as an obstructed route to nothingness, “le trou du néant – autrefois l’unique sortie – est bouché par l’être noué en nœud sans dénouement”. (*SMB*, p.63)

commentary, sometimes tenderly, but most often as a depraved but hypersensitive side-kick.⁴⁶ This impossibility for the self to escape the role allotted by the Ego, with whom it has to share fair weather and foul, has been described by Levinas as the “encombrement du Moi par le Soi-même” (*TA*, p.13), or “l’enchaînement d’un moi à son soi” (*DEE*, p.143). This state is one of simultaneous enchainment to being, and to the self; an engagement with existence in which the pain (or scandal) of being for the subject – *d’être* – becomes the pain of being in general – *de l’être*. (p.134, 147) Levinas describes a state similar, therefore, to Genet’s “vide solide”: in each case, the *étant* has become *être*, freezing all initiative in a kind of passivity.

Something has also gone awry with the dramatic nature of the instant. This is revealed with regard to the passage between existants and existence. As Levinas explains in the preface to the second edition of *De l’existence à l’existant*, it is not a case of prioritising the “« existant », dans l’*étant* humain” over being, ‘existence’ or ‘être’, which would merely be to inverse the ontological difference in Heidegger (p.12); instead he looks at their crossover through economic life and later, in *Totalité et infini*, the dwelling. Whereas usually one expects *existants* to convert *existence* from a state into a verb, albeit in the sweat of their brow, here, however, being is not being mastered in work (p.16), or sheltered from in the *demeure*, the store for economic life. Levinas comments in the section ‘La Demeure’ from *Totalité et infini*, that the task of contemplation for the planning of further work, already takes place in a separation which prefigures the *demeure* and also contains a dialectical relationship between being as a verb and being as a state: “La contemplation avec sa prétention de constituer, après coup, la demeure elle-même, atteste certes la séparation ou, mieux encore, est un moment indispensable de sa production.” (*TeI*, pp.126-27, *TeIb*, pp.163-64)⁴⁷ In fact here,

⁴⁶ This division in the subject is displayed in Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground* in which the hero senses he is probably despicable and in writing his story, does not justify himself, but instead takes a kind of pleasure in making the fact undeniable. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, trans. Jane Kentish, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Similarly, the Genet narrator in the novels becomes the criminal he is considered to be.

⁴⁷ Paul Valéry produces a similar description in *L’Homme et la coquille*, in which the snail produces its shell from calcite crystals absorbed then secreted from its environment: “l’être

the *existants* seem to be occupied by *existence*, rather than them maintaining a dwelling within it. Genet and Levinas each manage to locate the breakdown of temporal experience itself, and manage to infuse this with a dramatic form, even to the point where it ceases to function dialectically, the point at which it ceases to be an event. The lack of differentiation of *être* and *étant* will require us to examine more closely the nature of the instant as lived by the subject in ‘commencement’, the Levinasian term for the *existant*’s positing of itself in relation to being.

The possible continuation of time for the *étant* is in communication with an exterior, which offers relief from itself through non-identity. (*DEE*, p.160) This can only work with the other as other, because as soon as the other is absorbed into the subject, he becomes *être* once more, the state fled from in the first place. The manner in which being is mastered is therefore of the utmost importance. For the *il* to grasp its *est*, it has to pursue reward by overcoming resistance. But the resistance and reward yielded from the elements or nature through labour are not the same as the resistance and reward offered by another person. The desirability of a person is offset by the possibility that they may resist, refuse to reciprocate, or betray, traits common in the Genet universe; or never even be conscious of the efforts exerted for their benefit⁴⁸. Nonetheless, however uncertain this live negotiation may be, it is still preferable to totality whose unitary state of applicability cannot relieve the individual’s bond and bondage within their own being.

inarticulé, dont l’oeuvre peu à peu se distingue de la chair, et se détache progressivement de l’état vivant”. This is a work in which it can choose to live as a *demeure* or to adorn itself as “une tiare ou un turban prodigieux”. *L’Homme et la coquille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), p.16 and 80. Levinas’s admiration for this essay can be made out in the description of the ego as formative of the dwelling which bridges the exterior and interior: “Le moi est la contraction même du sentiment, le pôle d’une spirale dont la jouissance dessine l’enroulement et l’involution: le foyer de la courbe fait partie de la courbe.” (*TeI*, p.91, *TeIb*, p.123)

⁴⁸ See in *The Brothers*, Dmitry arrives at the dwelling of the peasant, Lyagavy, with whom he has some business, but the man is too drunk to talk sense. Dmitry determines to await the following morning before opening negotiations, but wakes up in the night to save them all from carbon monoxide poisoning; upon finally waking, Dmitry finds that the peasant is once again too drunk to talk. (*BK*, pp.441-46)

This is not the result of a reckoning whereby such negotiation is the only way to prevent one's own fate as an individual from being ignored in favour of the well-Being of the whole; this would amount merely to a "do unto others" kind of moral attitude. The difference is in the way the instant itself opens up the subject directly, rather than passing through a reasoned account as to whether we are or are not connected as people. In other words, a moral attitude is consciously argued and is applied from the exterior, whereas the opening of an interiority to the other as an exteriority is a preconscious, spontaneous, an-archic ethical experience. It is, paradoxically, an approach of the exteriority from within the subject. This, for Levinas, is the difference between morality and ethics.⁴⁹

Even if the other is detected then rejected, an ethical experience remains intact which may, nevertheless, constitute a bondage through the other, in the other's bondage to being. This may create a common experience, reminding the subject of his or her own linkedness to being. Thus, for Levinas, fear or anguish is an exception to the Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit*, translatable as 'feeling' or 'mood', but with its own specialised philosophical meaning, according to which the reflexivity of verbs expressing emotion ('s'effrayer', 'se fâcher', 's'émouvoir') signifies both being moved *by* something, and a being moved *for* the self. This strengthens the active reflexive sense of such verbs, as they apply to the self in the menace of being-towards-death; that is to say in a double intentionality, both moved *by* an affect and *for* their own finitude. In the Levinasian conception of anguish, it is possible for feeling to be provoked *by* some cause, but *for* the other in a "double « intentionnalité »" that does not return to the self; in which "La crainte pour l'autre homme ne retourne pas à l'angoisse pour *ma* mort". (*DVI*, p.263; see also *Eel*, p.118) This should make Levinas sympathetic to Genet's *trouille* and probably also his *colère*, as long as they are aroused pre-reflexively by the other's predicament and not through self-indulgence. But can I truly experience fear which, while being my fear, is not for

⁴⁹ Cocteau makes a parallel distinction, when he refers to Genet as a moral writer, but not as a moralist, since moralisation comes from the exterior. Jean Cocteau, *La Difficulté d'être*, (Paris: Éditions du Rocher Le Livre de Poche, 1989), p.177. Also quoted in *StG*, p.617.

me? How intolerable does the subject find this fundamental relationship to the other which, we have now established, springs from the interior? Need it really raise the blood pressure?

In a mental experiment in *Le temps et l'autre*, Levinas proposes a world in which there are no people, nor any links between things, only a generalised relationship to being, “ni sujet, ni substantif”. (*TA*, p.26) This means the *conatus essendi* no longer has purchase, and cannot grasp being through activity.⁵⁰ It is as though the exterior were no longer exterior at all, but had become symmetrically spaced with the self, turning them into a single substance with their environment. This suggests a despair in being, which would then seek release, and an end to despair in a time without suffering. It is a great mystery that such a hope should arrive in the moment of despair itself, not as a future promise of pleasure, but as a possible redemption of the moment of pain, of the scandal of being. Levinas explains that, “Toute l’acuité de l’espoir dans le désespoir tient à l’exigence du rachat de l’instant même du désespoir.” (*DEE*, p.158)⁵¹ The expectancy of another instant in its alterity cannot be found or dialectically produced within the self: this would be as impossible as coming to one’s own rescue. The spur of hope in despair, Levinas tells us, is to be found in the ultimate desirability of the Other:

Être dans le monde, c’est précisément s’arracher aux dernières implications de l’instinct d’exister, à tous les abîmes du moi qui jamais ne se dépouillera de ses masques et dont toutes les positions seront des poses,

⁵⁰ Similar to the section ‘Existence sans existant’ in *De l’existence à l’existant*. (*DEE*, pp.94-95) Especially: “La disparition de toute chose et la disparition du moi, ramènent à ce qui ne peut disparaître, au fait même de l’être auquel *on* participe, bon gré mal gré, sans en avoir pris l’initiative, anonymement.” (p.95)

⁵¹ See Genet’s total concentration and single-minded resourcefulness in addressing the death of Jean Decarnin: “Tel était mon chagrin de savoir Jean depuis quatre jours dans une tombe étroite, dans un cercueil de bois blanc, son corps déjà défait, que je fus sur le point de demander à un savant, mais très sérieusement:

- Êtes-vous sûr qu’on ne puisse plus le ressusciter?

La folie de cette question ne m’apparaît même pas aujourd’hui, car ce n’est pas ma raison qui la pose, mais mon amour. N’ayant pas de savant sous la main, c’est moi-même que j’interrogeai. J’attendis la réponse en frémissant d’espoir. L’espoir, en effet faisait frémir tout, autour de moi et en moi. J’attendais une invention que l’espoir seul pouvait trouver.” (*PF*, p.60)

à qui la confession est impossible, pour aller sincèrement au désirable et pour le prendre pour lui-même. (p.68)

Instead of tearing off ('arrachant') the 'masks of the ego', one is instead disturbed in the slough⁵² ('égarement') of the self by the call of the other. Being in the world requires some accountability from the subject. It is this that Genet finds so appalling in the episode on the train; that the unpleasant individual should appear to him as an equal or superior (*CQR*, p.27); that is to say, as an asymmetrical *vous* form, not the *tu* of a meeting between equals. Feeling in some way answerable, he experiences first despair.⁵³ The alternative placed before him is formulated by Visker as

the choice between an egocentrism that is *no longer* involuntary, and a giving up of that position in favour of that other centre which is precisely the Other *qua* Other. (*TaS*, p.257)

Genet then feels the promise of something else, in a kind of redemption of his initial pain through "le rayon – le premier – qui allait de l'œil d'un jeune homme au mien". (*CQR*, p.27) Genet gives credit for this event to the artist of the essay's title: this is what has remained of Rembrandt, an indebtedness through the alterity of the Other. There is next an intriguing use of the notion of 'denunciation': "Rembrandt le premier me dénonça." (p.29) It is no longer used in its usual Genetian sense as *délation*, or 'trahison d'amitié', in the way that it figures in the above passage about Genet's arrival in prison, but in the sense of being forced to stand responsible. This is a responsibility whose demands are ever young and serve to transform the initial descriptions, in both the *Atelier* and 'Rembrandt déchiré', of a 'miserable little old man' into the *beam from a young man's eye*. (p.29)

⁵² Here the semantics of the 'Slough of Despond' section to *The Pilgrim's Progress* seem to combine with the sloughing of a skin in the will to escape confused subjectivity. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. W.R.Owens, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵³ "[...] la tristesse qui s'était abattu en moi". (*Ibid.*)

This would appear to be at one with the Levinasian idea of a pre-contractual guilt and indebtedness before the Other (*Autrui*), as though to be forgiven for being, one had to answer to the other with whom one is confronted. This makes the other's position of weakness one of commandment. It is important to remember, at the same time, that the other commands, but does not compel, and the debt is a general one to all others and not just to the particular individual *en face*. So, the fact that the other can forgive my being does not mean that he will, or that it would be reasonable for me to satisfy his conditions. As Didier Franck points out, this relatedness to the Other does not stop the subject from remaining temporal, and life from going on.⁵⁴ This inability to act from the vantage point of any subject but one's own shows at the same time that the temporality of the subject is traversed by the diachronic time between subjects. This means that people have a generalised stake in the time of the Other, even if a particular other does not notice or appreciate this. When Genet reduces existence to the truths of reproduction of the self and responsibility for the other, he gives emphasis to the continuity of time for the separated subject, both with and without the other. He does this in his "engraissement" (*DVI*, p.58) (that is, his self-perpetuation), while at the same time "tenu en éveil par un autre" (p.59): this second outcome describes the possibility of an obverse moral adventure in which the subject is rerouted through the other, and wrenched from the Same.

Rather than insisting on any truth value in these experiences themselves, later in the passage Genet changes tack and declares that everything else, including fear and anger, might have been false – that the whole of reality outside these moments might have been an optical illusion: "Le reste tout le reste me paraissait l'effet d'une erreur d'optique provoquée par mon apparence elle-même nécessairement truquée". (*CQR*, p.29) So if his own appearance is rigged, then after tearing off the masks of the Ego to find the "*vide solide*", the only dependable reality left is 'the ray from the other's eye'. This is not only to enter into contact with a pre-existing Other, but also to be constituted through the

⁵⁴ Didier Franck, *Le drame des phénomènes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), p.101.

reality of this other. To return to Bakhtin's expression, this is "life on the threshold", and is an address prior to the transfer of any content. A rerouting also takes place in time: "je m'écoulais de mon corps [...]. Ou plutôt: *je m'étais écoulé*, car le regard fut si bref que je ne peux me le rappeler qu'avec l'aide de ce temps verbal." (p.22, 23) Genet does not know at what moment in an unremembered past he acquired this other, but it is an accomplished action, in the pluperfect. The present he comes to share with this man depends on a common past, and he finds that the desirability of the world can be accessed even through this undesirable other. This concurs closely with Levinas's thought in 'Dieu et la philosophie' in which the mark of freedom and ethical desire is being able to hear ethical commandment from the non-desirable. (*DVI*, p.113)

Before moving on to the textual relationship Genet has with Dostoevsky, I will discuss another of Genet's rather condensed verbal tricks for enunciating this newly found rapport between self and other. It concerns separation, without the possibility of common measure, as a condition of desire and intimacy. He writes:

Si chaque enveloppe, précieusement, recèle une même identité, chaque enveloppe est singulière et réussit à établir entre chacun de nous une opposition qui nous paraît irrémédiable, à créer une innombrable variété d'individus qui se veulent: l'un-l'autre. (*CQR*, p.28)

Is singularity, then, a prerequisite for association, born out of separation, allowing attraction; or is it instead the origin of competition and war? Characteristically, Genet does not clarify. On a first reading we might understand "vouloir" to be a reciprocal verb, giving with only a tiny alteration 'individus qui se veulent l'un l'autre' in mutual desire. But then strange use is made of a colon and hyphen, giving instead "individus qui se veulent: *l'un-l'autre*" (my emphasis) in limitless competition, as one and other. This textual twist need not express mutual desire in an activity with the other as direct object, but a sum of individuals, all of whom want to attain the state of "l'un-l'autre"; that is, of the one containing the other. This could be someone who first recognises the other in their singularity, but then

becomes tempted by solipsism, in spite of the initial outreach. Franck's assertion that the 'I' in isolation remains a temporal creature, whether or not it recognises the other, is therefore born out by Genet in this hinging of the "l'un-l'autre" between solipsism and mutual desire. Further along in the passage, however, Genet returns to the implications of the look, which contained "la certitude aussitôt que l'un l'autre n'était qu'un, à la fois ou moi ou lui, et moi et lui." (*Ibid.*) This newfound association and incarnation serves to "ten[ir] en éveil" (*DVI*, p.59), drawing the subject's attention away from its self and to the Other, moving from separation into the One, not of the Ego or of the Same, but the One of a possible shared ethical space. This One is, in a strange way, plural, and corresponds to the unspecified individuality of *Autrui* in Levinas.⁵⁵ The interconnectedness of the self and all others has at this point become a certainty for Genet.

The reciprocal nature of desire, however, is entirely dependent on the individual. As Genet explains, "Je n'étais pas très sûr qu'un autre homme eût pu se sentir s'écouler, par son regard, dans le corps d'un autre, ni que la signification pour lui de cette sensation eût été celle que je donnais ici." It transpires that in Genet's recounting of the episode in the train, he reformulates some words recounted by the Elder Zossima's dying brother in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The similarity is striking. In Dostoevsky we have: "every one of us is responsible for everyone else in every way and I most of all" (*BK*, p.339); which becomes, in Genet, the realisation "que tout homme est tout autre homme et moi comme tous les autres." (*CQR*, pp.30-31) Like Genet, Levinas also uses this quotation to express the asymmetry of subjectivity, and it is evoked numerous times throughout his oeuvre.⁵⁶

In Genet's first recounting of the train incident in *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, a slightly fainter echo of the Zossima quotation can be heard, which serves to underline again the far-reaching effects of this realisation, and of the

⁵⁵ The idea of the One of the shared impact of the subject on the world as an undiscovered community is reminiscent of Plotinus, as cited by Levinas in the 'La trace de l'Autre', *DHH*, p.281.

⁵⁶ "[N]ous sommes tous coupables de tout et de tous, et moi plus que tous les autres", *EN*, p.115; See also *AQE*, p.186, *AQEb*, p.228; *DVI*, p.119, pp.134-35 to mention but a few.

douleurux sentiment que n'importe quel homme en 'valait' exactement [...] n'importe quel autre. (*AT*, p.51)

Although this seems to bespeak more of a symmetrical relation between the two passengers when set next to the previous formulation, Genet proceeds to elaborate further on his loss of mastery, and explains that he does not work from simple choice:

Ne nous méprenons pas [...] il ne s'agissait pas d'une bonté venant de moi, mais d'une reconnaissance. (*Ibid.*)

The *reconnaissance* of enchainment to the other is involuntary and therefore certainly not a disposition towards 'generosity' in the sense of a self-proclaimed benevolence. This position of responsibility is also argued for by Levinas in 'Humanisme et an-archie'. There, the approach of the other does not trigger an inbuilt philanthropy, nor a perspective-less holy inclination, nor is it initially even an undertaking of will. It is instead an ethical footing elsewhere than in the *terra firma* of being. In this way Levinas speaks of exteriority creating a "lien anarchique entre le sujet et le Bien [...], lien anarchique sans que le sujet ait été volonté, il n'est pas la constitution de « l'instinct divin » de la responsabilité d' « une nature altruiste et généreuse », d'une « bonté naturelle »." (*HdH*, p.88) Neither writer could savour their *bonté*, since this would make it attainable within the subject, rather than being an inspiration ducted through the other in their unknowability. The link to the *Bien*, because it is anarchic, is founded on the responsibility and response of the subject alone, and is not a state of repose in a mutual relationship with a targeted other, any more than sainthood can be a state. The realisation of the other as a possible source of Good has nevertheless been made, as though displacing the subject; and for this reason Genet moves from his realisation to depression, and, at last, as though ineluctably, to the awareness that his discovery would "contraindre à de sérieux changements". (*CQR*, p.26)

We therefore surmise that it is only from the ego and the rending open of the ego that it is possible to reach the exterior. Genet's egology therefore wrestles with the first principles of the move towards the other. Its links to the Dostoevsky text in their turn aid interpretation as it transpires that both Genet and Levinas are describing the operations of a painful ethical process of encounter with the other, which may, nevertheless, yield a joy beyond pleasure. Interpersonal encounters in Genet may therefore, I would argue, be elaborated discursively. Dostoevsky's exposition of the relationship of the subject to itself is not only extended by Genet and Levinas in a conceptual continuation, but is followed by them in its repercussions in different kinds of discourse, both literary and philosophical. These efforts then lead through Dostoevsky's description of universal responsibility to reworkings of intersubjective asymmetry. The asymmetry of responsibility, which so devastates Genet, may have peculiar effects on the subject whereby the incredible weight of being accountable to all leads to a concealed rejection of the other. The other is not immediately recognisable in his desirability, and may even be highly undesirable, especially to the "inexperienced in love" as Alyosha says in *The Brothers*, quoting Zossima to Ivan. (BK, p.276) It may cause the exclusion or elimination of people from the individual's staging of their field of experience. The claim, whether voiced or not, that one is interceding for a third party, as we shall see, is at the same time a primary way of justifying volition on behalf of the self alone, and a necessary part of life in a plural world. Levinas is quite aware of the difficulty this poses to infinite responsibility, and addresses it using his notion of 'the Third':

Le moi peut être appelé, au nom de cette responsabilité illimitée, à se soucier de soi. Le fait que l'autre, mon prochain, est aussi tiers par rapport à un autre, prochain lui aussi, est la naissance de la pensée, de la conscience et de la justice et de la philosophie. (AQE, p.165, AQEb, p.204)

Between the different others (*autres*) with which one is faced, and the Other (*autrui*), who cannot be avoided, there is the relation to the non-present Third, who obliges the individual to negotiate between different others. This allows the individual to plot a course which, while it does not exclude the possibility of illusory routes to the Other, does discourage their proliferation, as the Third supplements and alters the imperative of the address of individual others. We shall also discuss in the next section of this chapter the confusions Rashkalknikov experiences in trying to reach out: he starts off with the intention of helping others, but in the interference between his will, particular others, and the Third, finishes by committing murder.

3. Egology and substitution

Genet makes much of false routes to transcendence, and the dual impulse of Desire and its refusal on the approach of the other. ‘Rembrandt déchiré’ and *L’Atelier d’Alberto Giacometti* are powerful reviews of his method. In fact, Genet and Dostoevsky spend most of their poetic energy describing the perpetuation of the self, with only chinks of redemption, or most often aborted routes to transcendence. It is a marvel to observe the unstable universes they manage to hold together, and interesting to note the similarly chaotic treatment they reserve for their characters.⁵⁷ Rashkalknikov bounces from suffering through confession to defiance, without reaching full penitence or potential for regrowth until perhaps the coda of the novel. The way had long since ceased to be clear to him. Rashkalknikov feels desperately responsible for his family and their predicament,

⁵⁷ Catteau, quoted by Rolland, remarks on the author’s relationship to the universe of his novels: “Dostoïevski y apparaît comme l’ordonnateur suprême des gestes et le maître des vies. Il y organise les tourments pour saisir la souffrance dans les regards, extorque l’aveu avec une cruauté plus grande que dans le roman, tranche les vies et ressuscite les morts avec une désinvolture de despote.” (*QDL*, p.142) Sartre also comments on Genet not dissimilarly: “Il joue sur un clavier dont il n’entend pas le son mais il sait qu’on entend là-bas dans la chambre voisine [...]” (*StG*, p.607)

as they are financially destitute and his sister is about to marry the unpleasant lawyer, Luzhin, to help secure the completion of his studies and future employment. It is ostensibly for this reason that he plans the murder and robbery. As Rolland remarks, two episodes of utter passivity are described one after the other in the lead-up to the murder: the meeting with the raped girl, whom he protects, followed by the recounting of the childhood episode in which he saw a horse beaten to death by drunken peasants. It is at this point that his plan is all but abandoned, as he encounters other others than his family. On his return to himself he comments:

Good God! Is it possible? [...] No, I couldn't do it! I just couldn't do it! Even if there were no mistake whatever in all my calculations, even if anything I had decided during the last month were as clear as day and as true as arithmetic. (*CP*, pp.78-79)⁵⁸

This review of the operations of his own thoughts is of particular interest in the context of multi-voiced criticism, as well as for phenomenology. For the hero, strange new thoughts had begun to follow the patterns of everyday reasoning, without setting off alarm bells. The comparison with arithmetic is of particular interest in the context of phenomenology, initially conceived by Husserl as a method for better describing the event of logical operations in mathematics. Husserl's worry, like Rashkalknikov's, was that logical operations may unknowingly allow erroneous meanings to be applied to terms, whilst not disturbing their surface impression of logicity: that is to say that even in exact sciences one cannot rule out the emission of a whole halo of supplementary meaning of which one is not in control.⁵⁹ The real danger with what we shall term "false transcendence" is that, deriving its meaning from the reduction of

⁵⁸ For the meaningful succession of scenes see Rolland, *QDL*, p.99.

⁵⁹ In 'De la connaissance à la veille', Levinas quotes Husserl, "En vertu d'une équivoque qui passe inaperçue, d'autres concepts peuvent se glisser après coup sous ces mots, et, pour les significations professionnelles qui ont été modifiées, on peut faire appel à tort à l'évidence expérimentée antérieurement." (*DVI*, p.40)

neighbouring phenomena, it functions as though it were ‘more objective than objectivity’, and therefore authentically a ‘transcendental movement’⁶⁰. So, for example, Ivan who is subconsciously implicated in his father’s murder does not engage knowingly in dissimulation when he feels “reassured” at the apparent proof of Dmitry’s guilt, which “assume[s] in his eyes the nature of a mathematical certainty.” (*BK*, p.727) It is significant that in *Crime and Punishment*, exposure to others’ suffering has transcendently called the student away from obsession with his plan. But then in the very next scene, Rashkalnikov overhears a Lieutenant and a student discussing the same murder, albeit from a purely abstract point of view, during their game of billiards. For them the rightness of the murder has no rigorous truth value and they leave it at that: “if you’re not prepared to do it yourself, it’s not a question of justice at all. Come on, let’s have another game.” (*CP*, p.85; *QDL*, p.27-28) Their eavesdropper, however, cannot escape the logic of his idea; the fact that another on his horizon has brought him into proximity with a desire, even in the ultimate form of dissuasion, confirms that the exegeses of intentionality are also intimately connected to volition. He knows that objectively the murder is wrong, but to him the earlier readings derived from his subjectivity, which wants to murder, are more objective than any objectivity. Therefore, Rashkalnikov not only repents, thinking better of the murder, but then repents of this repentance. This intentionality is not used in the intellectual sense it holds for Husserl, “non point au sens neutralisé et désincarné [...] mais dans son sens courant avec l’aiguillon du désir qui l’anime”, to use Levinas’s formulation. (*DEE*, p.56) After the murder, Rashkalnikov defends the logicity of his plan to Porfiry. It is interesting to note that genuine and sociable resourcefulness of mind and an eager will to explain have been brought to bear on psychopathic tendencies.

In his article, Rashkalnikov has latched onto a great universalising abstract idea of what the extraordinary man may be allowed. He even suggests that Newton would have had the right to kill if someone had stood in the way of his

⁶⁰ “Comme si l’événement ontologique fondamental, déjà perdu dans l’objet saisi ou reflété, était plus objectif que l’objectivité, un mouvement transcendantal.” (*DHH*, p.176)

theories. If we manage to reach behind the apparent lucidity of our subject, the choice of Newton is of particular interest because the association of his laws with truth constitutes a universal. However, Rashkalnikov misuses this association to spearhead his desire. That Newton would have a “duty” to murder in order to prove the laws of gravitation and movement, to which everyone is subject in any case, is to subject human happiness to a hypothetical scientific opportunity for the pursuit of knowledge.⁶¹ His argument becomes completely circular, however, at the point at which a given scientific investigation takes the sacrifice of the other as its object, rather than as a possible sanction for its successful completion. Rashkalnikov wants to know whether murder is possible without an outcry of internal ethical law, and through this transgression to find out whether he is sovereign. It is a test of the total independence of the self against a theory from which no-one is independent. The implications of his plan have a pretension to seek the other, but succumb instead to an in-turn of the self into the self.

His parallel and simultaneous wish to murder and to help the needy meets its full dereliction in Sonia. She has “stepped over” (*CP*, p.344) into sin by becoming a prostitute, against the inclination of her pure heart, not as an experiment, but purely out of need. Because she is still unable to earn enough to support her family, this creates a downward spiral of self-destruction. Sonia’s ruin luminously signals Rashkalnikov’s own, as his step was taken deliberately. Where she is in need out of simple need, his need is the result of a number of deliberate decisions. This realisation has a devastating effect on him.⁶² He finally recognises

⁶¹ “I simply hinted that the ‘extraordinary’ man has a right – not an officially sanctioned right, of course – to permit his conscience to step over certain obstacles, but only if it is absolutely necessary for the fulfilment of his idea on which quite possibly the welfare of all mankind may depend. [...] In my opinion, if for some reason or another the discoveries of the Keplers and Newtons could not be made known to people except by sacrificing the lives of one, or a dozen, or a hundred, or even more men who made discoveries impossible or in any way prevented them from being made, then Newton would have had the right, and indeed would have been duty bound, to – to *eliminate* the dozen or the hundred people so as to make his discoveries known to all mankind. That, however, does not at all mean that Newton would have had the right to murder anyone he liked indiscriminately or steal everyday in the street market.” (*CP*, p.276)

⁶² The manner in which Rashkalnikov at first taunts Sonia leads Rolland to speculate that he is preparing himself mentally for another murder. (*QDL*, p.100)

in the confession scene that “no doubt [he] did wrong” (p.429), and later becomes more effusive:

It was because I knew perfectly well I was not a Napoleon. [...] I wanted to murder, Sonia, to murder without casuistry, to murder for my own satisfaction, *for myself alone*. I didn't want to lie about it. I did not commit this murder to become the benefactor of humanity by gaining wealth and power – that, too, is nonsense. I just did it; I did it *for myself alone* [...] (p.432, my emphasis)

His aim therefore seems to have been to murder the claims of the other upon himself, and the other in himself, for himself alone. His embrace of the “vide solide” feels to him like suicide, and yet one suspects that here too self-denunciation may be a way of trying to distract himself from the recurrence of the self that condemns his act, “Was it the old hag I killed? No, I killed myself, and not the old hag. I did away with myself at one blow and for good.” (p.433) Nevertheless, his instinct towards life proves strong, but even after his sentencing, and indeed upon reaching prison in Siberia, he reverts for a matter of (perhaps) years to justifying the murder, and earns the enmity of his fellow prisoners⁶³ to such an extent that he is almost murdered in his turn. (p.554) Both Rashkalnikov and Genet's narrator-character, in contradistinction to the author himself, retain the hope of persuading the other of the finesse of their plan and of their ultimate autonomy. Any transcendence found in these novels has been prepared by the author to be discovered at the moment when the reader moves beyond a homophonic manner of reading, exceeding the individual characters, contexts and texts as they unfurl.

In spite of the marked resistance of Dostoevsky to expressing redemption as an achieved object, only allowing it to exert its pull from beyond the borders of

⁶³ In *The House of the Dead* it is considered “not done” between prisoners to exchange crime stories. (HofD, p.31)

his texts, there is an important difference between himself and Genet. In Dostoevsky's major novels, it is the heroes who fluctuate between community and their inadaptability to community. In Genet, it is the author-narrator himself who enters the community of the book with a fully developed poetic language, nourished by the canon and a history of *belles lettres*, only then to imply he does not belong there.⁶⁴ Bakhtin calls this kind of hero in Dostoevsky a "déclassé member of the intelligentsia". (PD, p.22) This would not quite be an accurate description of Genet's narrator-character, who is a more dedicated vagabond wielding a more fragmentary language. On the other hand, he does present himself as a marginal member of an "accidental tribe" (*Ibid.*) through his descriptions of failed communities of forced association, starting with prison. The effects of polyphony in both cases are comparable. Genet comments of Dostoevsky's major novels that the only one to have a comic structure is *The Brothers Karamazov*, in its singularly unpredictable, even bipolar, universe, in which an intention may produce the most unexpected effects, and one interpretation be as valid as its opposite. (ED, p.214) This comedy is also the pinnacle of dialogism for Bakhtin, as the outcome for any of the three brothers remains undecided.⁶⁵

An objection that might be made to Genet is that his novels seem to be little more than internally dialogised throughout, and may be viewed as limited to the author's conceit not only in their endings, but in their entirety. However, we are dealing neither with dialogised monologue nor poetic ambiguity, but a dialogic language evolving between different characters, traces and marks disseminated throughout literature and the diverse world it represents. As Bernard Sichère points out, Sartre does not grasp Genet's use of language in its full complexity when he describes the *irréalisation* of the novel corpus – "[l]'Opéra

⁶⁴ "Mon talent sera l'amour que je porte à ce qui compose le monde des prisons et des bagnes. [...] [J]e reconnais aux voleurs, aux traîtres, aux assassins, aux méchants, aux fourbes une beauté profonde – une beauté en creux – que je vous refuse." (JV, p.117)

⁶⁵ For Bakhtin, *The Brothers Karamazov* contains the only fully dialogic ending of all his novels. (PD, p.40)

fabuleux” – as having masturbation for its outcome. (*StG*, pp.409-10)⁶⁶ The game Genet plays with the reader can be reduced neither to fantasy nor to the crude identification with any of his characters, which is sometimes attempted and about which Sichère warns us. He quotes the following comment from Sartre, “Divine, c’est-à-dire Genet.” (*StG*, p.328)⁶⁷ There may be a moribund aspect to each of them but they are separated from one another, and remain out of kilter. The self-destruction Sonia chooses is tracked by an author for whom the finding of himself in himself is ceasing to distract, and is beginning to force reflections upon, if not relations with, the exterior. This does not mean that the reflection upon the exterior cannot return to self-admiration, such as when, echoing Sonia from *Crime and Punishment*, Madame from *Les Bonnes* promises to follow her jailed husband to Siberia. (*GOC5*, p.160) Nonetheless, the veiled relationships we have seen to other texts in ‘Rembrandt déchiré’ lead one to realise that Genet’s working hypothesis on self-sufficiency is as double-accented as those of Rashkalnikov and Ivan Karamazov, characters with whom Genet opens discrete dialogues.

This does not of course mean that idea-characters recognise one another head on, nor that they fulfil the same function in their source texts as in Genet’s. Indeed, they may have inverse attitudes and intents, and only brush past one another on the *passerelle*, or hidden passage between works, and so signify only as trace. The effect is, borrowing again from Levinas’s essay ‘Le Dialogue’, the opening of a passage “là où il n’y a plus de passage”. (*DVI*, p.223) We shall give a fairly literal example before looking at the more ambiguous, symbolic variations in which, as Sichère puts it, “tout peut devenir autre et signifier autrement.”⁶⁸

Rashkalnikov has been told by Sonia, “Go to the cross-roads, bow down to the people, kiss the earth, for you have sinned against it, and proclaim in a loud voice to the whole world: I am a murderer!” We follow his thoughts as he heads for the crossroads:

⁶⁶ Bernard Sichère, *Le Dieu des philosophes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p.143. Sichère refers to the 578 pp. edition of *StG*, the quotation for which is on p.341.

⁶⁷ Sichère, p.144.

⁶⁸ Sichère, p.145.

I'm just like a child – bragging to myself. [...] Lord, how they push! The fat one [...] who pushed me just now – does he know whom he pushed? [...]

He had a strong aversion, for being among the common people; but now he deliberately went where the crowd was thickest. (*CP*, p.536)⁶⁹

The opening to *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs* is in direct and deliberate contrast to the above passage from *Crime and Punishment*. The criminal Weidmann, cast as a German aviator, crash lands in the barley fields, while his radiant newspaper image is spread into the furthest corners of France. Here, Rashkalnikov's question, 'does he know whom he pushed?' is answered, and it is revealed:

aux bourgeois attristés que leur vie quotidienne est frôlée d'assassins enchanteurs [...]. (*ND*, p.9)

In each passage the contact with the murderer is made unknowingly or passively ('se faire frôler'), but whereas one is on the point of confession and possible redemption, the other is moving in the opposite direction, and is surrounded by an aura of beauty and enchantment which may last as long as the author's conceit. In each case, there is a sense of imminent moral drama invisibly taking place. In each case, the reader has to look outside the confines of the text in order to find any transcendence of the described conditions, as, at the present moment, Rashkalnikov is mocked and Weidmann is imprisoned, awaiting execution. The traces one situation leaves in the other signify without their point of contact needing to form a separate sign. The trace does not render present the thing that has passed, redeeming it, but merely signals its absence. Similar to the address which, as we discussed above, is the 'spiritual event' of language even before any content has been communicated, the trace creates an attentive or receptive

⁶⁹ The narrator-hero of Sartre's short story 'Érostrate' in *Le Mur* is reminiscent in different ways of Rashkalnikov, including a decisive descent into the street towards its conclusion. *Le Mur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939).

passivity before something that has not been intended as enunciation. Such associations of absence and address are the province of the artist who organises them to be resonant with the world. In such a logic, the creative mode of 'showing not telling' may be inadequate, as that which has withdrawn will leave more absence than trace.

For example, in *Crime and Punishment*, transcendence is hinted at through the coda, with Rashkalnikov spontaneously reading the raising of Lazarus in prison. Arguing within the logic of the trace, Rolland points out that in the first reading of the passage in Book IV, Chapter 4, it is from a Bible given to Sonia by Lizaveta, Rashkolnikov's second murder victim, that they read. (*CP*, pp.342-43; *QDL*, pp.137-38) So, the resurrection of Lazarus is in an important sense a trace left by someone murdered. Similarly, in Genet, beyond the general need to quit the atmosphere of the hero-narrator, we may glimpse through its parallel texts other literary attempts at escape from the self. So, when at the very beginning of the Genet novel we are given a hint of the penitent Rashkalnikov, a transcendent exterior has been alluded to, even though it is counterposed with a different and more potent criminal context, as the murderer Weidmann is confused with the *Blitzkreig*. Thus, if the transcendent content in *Crime and Punishment* takes place in the coda, its annex, then any transcendence to be found in *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs* may also exist in different times to that of the action. The trace and the aesthetic have something in common in that they are out of phase with the reader's own present. One of these alternative times, it would appear, is in a completely different book, in the coda to the Dostoevsky text.

The major Dostoevsky novels are constructed from tendencies towards monology set in a fabric of polyvalence. Genet's novel, on the other hand, requires the reader to work even harder in pursuit of polyvalence, as the style derives its very power from an attack on the reader's expectations, and its dominant impulse towards the nurturing and smothering of alterity, to the detriment of both the characters and the narrator. In fact, the failure to recognise, the multiplicity of tone or of parallel possibilities has led some critics of Genet to woefully misread the novels as expressions of tendencies to monology in

antisocial characters, themselves set in the tendency to monology of an antisocial narrator, without noticing the complexity of the bursts of awareness occasioned by this contraction within a contraction.⁷⁰ The ability to follow human relations behind monology, towards the irreducible polyphony that formed these relations, lies in the ability to explore modes of the relation to the Other Itself.

We shall now take a look at a more sophisticated dialogised monologue than Rashkalnikov's in order to observe the manner in which a single statement may refract meaning in manifold ways between individuals. To this end, we shall examine the double-voiced, double-accented relationship between Ivan and Smerdyakov in *The Brothers*.

As we have observed in the dismantling of monological discourse in Rashkalnikov, and in the narrative voice of Genet's novels, a single idea may create quite contrary meanings within the subject. We will look at Ivan with his "ethical and metaphysical loopholes" in his relationship to Smerdyakov, and how the monstrous or marvellous event takes place whereby Ivan's "consciousness is seized by another's discourse". (*PD*, p.205) Bakhtin offers the following analysis:

One of the thoughts is obvious, determining the *content* of speech; the other is hidden but nevertheless determines the *structuring* of speech, casting its shadow upon it. (p.247)

⁷⁰ One such example is the superb account in *Pompes funèbres* of the prison riot in which, upon regaining control, the *milice* are placed in authority over both the political and ordinary prisoners. A boy thief, Pierrot, must placate the authorities and points out prisoners of his own age not on the basis of guilt, but choosing those whom he simply dislikes. His role in the prison is compared by Genet to the role of the *milice* in France. (*PF*, pp.145-48) That is to say, the criminality of a thug on a prison wing containing the innocent is compared to the criminality of the *milice* holding sway over an occupied nation. Stewart, however, does not seem to recover from his discovery that this episode has a historical basis in the Santé prison rebellion. Although he is careful to note that Genet could not have been a first hand witness, having been released a few months earlier, his not having passively withstood the action then assumes the proportions of the worse form of agency in the drama, by speculating that he got his information direct from the militia, and not only from the militia but from its leaders: "perhaps Toesca, Dubois or Buissière himself." (Stewart, *Jean Genet: from Fascism to Nihilism*, p.78). If this were true, then the terrible irony of its retelling would be all the more far-reaching and acerbic.

According to Bakhtin's schema, for Rashkalnikov the "content" of his plan was to help his family, while the "structure" was to commit a murder.⁷¹ Ivan's dynamic is still more complicated, as its end-point is arrived at through a form of accidental maieutics; one which leads to confusion and indirectly to murder before it approaches the truth again, in Ivan's decision to testify at Dmitry's trial. Let me quote at some length from Bakhtin's analysis of Ivan's speech:

First his desire for his father's death and then his participation in the murder are the facts that invisibly determine his discourse [...]. To a considerable extent the process of Ivan's inner life as depicted in the novel is the process of his recognition and affirmation, for himself and for others, of what he has in fact already long known. [...]

This process unfolds primarily in dialogues, and above all in dialogues with Smerdyakov. Smerdyakov gradually gains control over that voice of Ivan's which Ivan is hiding from his own self. Smerdyakov is able to govern that voice precisely because Ivan's consciousness does not look in that direction and does not wish to look there. [...] (*PD*, pp.247-48; *BK*, Book V, Chapter 7)

Ivan has been seized by Smerdyakov's discourse because the murder was also a desire. Ivan leaves for Chermashnya, and although the object of discourse remains this destination, its significance changes from a mere journey to the green light for murder. As Ivan becomes delusional after his resolution to confess to the murder, his idea-partner shifts from Smerdyakov to the devil, who reads his responsibility into every act. The play of voices, therefore, "is not dependent on any opposition in content or plot" (*PD*, p.222), but merely on vari-directional words which become shadowed in guilt. The shift in accent within Ivan's words begun by Smerdyakov, and continued by the devil, launches a hidden polemic inside the

⁷¹ William Golding's *Pincher Martin* is structured around just such an example of double thought. The content of Pincher's "Hard a-starboard for Christ's sake!" is to save the boat, while the structure is to murder another officer leaning out from the port side in prayer. William Golding, *Pincher Martin* (London: Faber, 1956), p.15.

hero. This internally fought controversy sends Ivan into mental illness before he can effectively witness in the trial to his partial responsibility, which would at the same time almost certainly lead to Mitya's acquittal. Smerdyakov then becomes immaterial to the obsessional advance of guilt, and it is in a very real sense that Ivan's final idea-partner should be the Accuser himself. He finds dishonourable intentions in confession, his only hope, and his second mind, in the form of the idea-partner, works to prevent it. The devil addresses him, "you had a hope that Smerdyakov might be convicted and sent to Siberia, and Mitya would be acquitted, while you would only be punished with moral condemnation". (p.222; *BK*, Book XI, Chapter 10) Although this was not his primary consideration, Ivan's disintegrating mind turns clemency into his primary motive, rather than merely a consideration. Ivan was already acquainted with the possibility of his father's murder, but his willing it was an unenounced, preconscious wish. So having learned that he provided the prompt for the event, Ivan can only see his own explicit conscious responsibility. The *donnée* and the *donor* of sense have merged, and even without practical involvement, he has become the deed's creature. This results in a kind of possession by guilt: for Levinas, a "possession où disparaît la différence entre possédant et possédé". (*HdH*, p.88)

There is an early portent to the physical coming to be of vari-directional thought after the initial discussion with Smerdyakov over Chermashnya (*BK*, p.321), when Ivan without "of course know[ing] himself" several times leaves his apartment and listens to his father's movements below, as though assessing his vulnerability. It is next explained:

That 'action' of his he called 'contemptible' all his life afterwards; and deep inside him, in the most secret recesses of his heart, he thought of it as the vilest action of all his life. (p.324)

What would normally pass as an innocent piece of behaviour has here become an "action", as it is the preconscious manifestation of an act of double thought. These considerations will be very important for our analysis of different kinds of action

in the third chapter, though it is worth commenting now that Genet is highly interested in such acts of omission and their relationship to will, as when, in his interview with Hubert Fichte, he suggests a question to the interviewer; whether or not he, Genet, had ever caused anyone's death. Immediate moral latitude appears, as one wants to know whether the question refers to a voluntary or involuntary cause of death. For Genet, this is the very crux of the argument, which is why he questions himself in the presence of a witness, and then refuses to answer, deliberately refusing the possibility of different increments of guilt. (*ED*, p.160) It is just such a maddening mode of questioning that seizes Ivan in *The Brothers*.

If Ivan inadvertently planted the idea of murder in Smerdyakov's mind, then in return Smerdyakov more than convinces a part of Ivan's mind that it was a joint venture. The hidden internal polemic producing an unsuspected will to murder seems to witness to the extreme precarity of just behaviour. What is especially interesting to note here is that, while Ivan's idea-partner gravitated from being Smerdyakov to being the devil, it started out as being the Elder Zossima, whose declaration on the subject of responsibility was examined above. This move from Zossima the Saintly to Satan the Accuser seems to show them forming part of the same ethical figure of obsession, though while one suggests hyperbolic responsibility, the other suggests the production of cynicism. This cynicism or insincerity works for the extinction of alternative existences, times and courses of action, and behaves as a rebellion against the Good, a struggle which reaches titanic proportions in Ivan. The significance of Smerdyakov, who separates the commandment of Zossima from the accusation of Satan, will prove an important dividing line in our discussion.

One reading could be very lenient on Ivan and hard on Smerdyakov, saying that Smerdyakov premeditated and executed the murder alone. Indeed, that Ivan did not consciously will the murder allows Alyosha to intervene during his brother's description of his torments:

You have accused yourself and have confessed to yourself that you are the murderer and no one else. But you didn't do it: you are mistaken: you are not the murderer. Do you hear? It was not you! God has sent me to tell you so. (BK, p.706, Book XI, Chapter 5)⁷²

A closer reading, however, shows that Smerdyakov cannot be considered a devilish tempter or accuser since he thought he was merely executing Ivan's wishes, albeit seeking the added advantage of escaping his position as lackey. What Smerdyakov construes as their partnership over the murder would constitute the first community to which Smerdyakov has ever belonged. We return to Bakhtin:

Ivan, according to Dostoevsky's plan, wants his father murdered, but he wants it under the condition that he himself remain not only externally, but even *internally* uninvolved in it. He wants the murder to occur as an inevitability of fate, not only *apart from his will*, but *in opposition to it*. "Be sure," he says to Alyosha, "I shall always defend him [father...]. But in my wishes I reserve myself full latitude in this case." (PD, pp.258; BK, p.167, Book III, Chapter 9)

Bakhtin continues:

The internally dialogic dissociation of Ivan's will might be presented in the form of two such rejoinders in a dialogue:

"I do not desire my father's murder. If it happens, it will be against my will."

"But I desire that the murder take place against my will, because then I will be internally uninvolved in it and will have nothing with which to reproach myself." (PD, p.258)

⁷² Also examined by Bakhtin, whose edition of *The Brothers* we reproduce. (PD, p.255)

This is an absolutely central tenet of Genet's poetic method: that crime may be unknowingly desired by the right-thinking, not only independently of their will, but also against it. This is not directly a problem of people's egoism, but a problem found in the egological structure of consciousness itself, which allows self-referentiality to cleave to the will. In order to render the egology of such events "*no longer involuntary*" (*TaS*, p.257), and to make responsibility for the other possible, the subject must first be made conscious of these movements, the chief of which is in the risk of betrayal on the hazy dividing line between omission and commission, of which Dostoevsky's instantiation is an extremely subtle example.

Bakhtin develops the point in the following way:

The first rejoinder in Ivan's internal dialogue Smerdyakov does not hear, and to the very end he does not believe that Ivan's first voice really and seriously did not desire the death of his father. (*PD*, p.258)

So, the death may genuinely not have been actively desired by Ivan, but at the same time, a prompting or interrupting "Smerdykovian" voice still exists in him, otherwise he could not have been prompted into any realisation of complicity at all:

Therefore Ivan's words, which Smerdyakov understands as an allegory with the opposite meaning, are in fact not allegories at all. They are Ivan's direct words. But the voice that answers Smerdyakov is interrupted here and there by the hidden rejoinder of his second voice. Thanks to these interruptions, Smerdyakov remains fully convinced of Ivan's compliance. (pp.258-59)

Ivan has therefore failed adequately to protect his father, while his passive desire has been eerily lived out without his intervention. He has discovered

simultaneously his partial guilt in the murder and his neglect of Dmitry, as well as his neglect of Smerdyakov, a future persecutor whose daring he encouraged. This translates into hyperbolic responsibility for the persecutor described by Levinas. (*AQE*, p.162, *AQEb*, p.200) We remember the words of Zossima, suggesting that the prosecutor – also a kind of Accuser – may be more responsible than the criminal in the dock:

[Y]ou too are guilty, for you might have given light to the evil-doers, even as the one man without sin and you have not given them light. If you had, you would have lighted a path for them too, and he who had committed the felony would not have committed it if you had shown him a light. (*BK*, p.379)

This also brings to mind the first of the three epigraphs to *Autrement qu'être* in which responsibility for the persecutor is thought of in terms of an extreme or hyperbolic responsibility.⁷³ The virtuous turned from the righteous path will be stopped by God, “parce que tu ne l’auras pas averti, il mourra dans son péché et les actes de vertu qu’il a accomplis ne seront pas mentionnés, mais de son sang, je te demanderai compte.” (*Ezekiel* 3.30)

It transpires that regardless of belief in God or of direct intervention, ‘all has *not* been permitted’, as Ivan had pretended in his philosophy, for he descends into madness and Smerdyakov takes his own life. Just like Rashkalnikov, who wanted to escape all responsibility, the two men have been caught by the anarchic link to the Other, which we described above in ‘Rembrandt déchiré’. The trace of the Other in Levinas is also described as Illicity, in relation to the third person *Il*, which opens the dimension of the Good, and even the trace of God in His *ab-solu*, present through absence in His flight, or absolute discretion. Very significantly, Smerdyakov betrays a more direct belief than Ivan, not only in the Other (in the

⁷³ Cf. also a sceptical Paul Ricœur in *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil/Points Essais, 1990), p.390.

way encounters signify not only in the face-to-face, but in relation to absent third parties), but also, astonishingly, in God. Their final interview includes the following dialogue:

‘No, sir, there ain’t no phantom here except the two of us, and another one besides. No doubt he’s sitting here between the two of us, the other one.’

‘Who is he [...]?’

‘The other one’s God, sir. Aye, Providence itself. It’s here beside us, sir. Only you needn’t look for it. You won’t find it.’ (*BK*, p.731)

It is only at this meeting that Smerdyakov realises it will not be possible to conclude the practical aspects of the robbery with his unwilling partner, and falls low on moral energy. Ivan decides to testify, but very soon, his diseased mind with all the intellectual virtuosity at its disposal, rebels against the enormity of his decision. They have each excluded themselves from the possibility of “Providence”, or union, in the One.

This proves fatal to Smerdyakov, who realises that the ‘se veulent l’un l’autre’ with Ivan he thought they had established in cooperation has changed form. By this we do not mean his backing off in the belief that the whole venture was a misunderstanding, nor that Ivan would not respond to blackmail. If indeed, as Bakhtin claims, “Smerdyakov remains fully convinced of Ivan’s compliance” (*PD*, p.259), then it is possible that he feels purely instrumental in the proceedings, and that he has been trapped in the “se veut l’un-l’autre” (with hyphen) of Ivan’s designs. A key fact supporting this view is his handing Ivan the three thousand roubles at the third interview. That Ivan should take them is even more surprising. This seems to follow a similar logic to the sporadic answers given by his second voice, which at moments understands Smerdyakov’s allegorical speech and its murderous intentions, even though Ivan’s cooperation is more practical than verbal within the logic of the shared undertaking. Ivan then has his unbelief in God supplanted by belief in the devil, who tempts him through what Levinas calls the “mensonge luciférien” of suggesting that Good and Evil

are contemporaries, or twin brothers. (*HdH*, pp.88-89) These lines can be usefully understood in the context of *The Brothers*, as Levinas can be seen to argue in ‘La trace de l’Autre’ that Ivan’s confusion is in reaction to a pre-existing Good, and so is of Luciferian character. Ivan is twice tempted: first to consider Dmitry as guilty, and then not to testify. The twin brothers are reminiscent in this chapter first of Genet’s imaginary cellmate, a partner in crime, who he would like both to be utterly similar to himself and to have within his power, and then of the myriad relationships between the different Karamazov boys, all of whom become subject to what Levinas goes on to call “l’attrait érotique de l’irresponsabilité”. (p.88)⁷⁴ This attraction exercises itself over he who is not “le gardien de son frère”, in whom the invisible interchangeability of Good and Evil may find a footing. This refusal of responsibility is an echo of Cain, the first fratricide, who tried to conceal the murder of his brother by claiming non-responsibility, ignorance and indifference. (*Ibid.*)

This indifference is increased by differences in rank. As Levinas goes on to remark, in ‘Humanisme et an-archie’:

L’être persévérant dans l’être, l’égoïsme ou le Mal, dessine ainsi la dimension même de la bassesse et la naissance de la hiérarchie. (*HdH* p.89)

The only glaring hierarchy amongst the brothers is that Smerdyakov is always at the bottom, and is made to abase himself to other’s plans, preceding his own venture. Since, in this case, kinship relations are superseded by relations of social hierarchy, the temptation to sovereign choice creeps in even under the guise of obedience to others, as when Smerdyakov thinks he has been commissioned to murder their father (which will be discussed in further detail later). Furthermore, the Good is not a form of servitude, but an obedience to the Other. However, the

⁷⁴ We remember that Bataille illustrates transgression against the Good, thought of as decency, in terms of the arousal caused by nudity, or more properly the denuding of another, which serves also to underline the erotics of irregularity, or irresponsibility. (*LM*, p.137)

Other is not isolatable within a particular person, nor to the feedback or readings they may occasion. The concrete interactions made by an individual are hence caught between their incarnation in any given situation and the flux in the Third of the different beings upon whom the situation will impact. The Other, or “l’autre demeurant autre”, consisting in a flux of meanings, cannot be inventoried ahead of time as though from a wallet of labels; it remains absent: past, or as yet to come. (p.89, 19) The carnality of subjects separates them from one other, and places them “au bord de l’éros”, in relation to being and double intentionality, whereby I am made to feel desire *by* something or someone which is at the same time *for* the self. As Levinas remarks, “Cette tentation de se séparer du Bien, est l’incarnation même du sujet ou sa présence dans l’être.” (p.89) This Eros, as we have suggested in discussing Genet’s imaginary cellmate, may be a movement from the *Same* to the *Self*, and be at the point where egology becomes egoism, whereby others noticed in being are left to suffer. This does not mean, however, as Donna Brody claims, that the *Other* is “always” and “already endogenous to being”⁷⁵, but that certain *others* obscured by hierarchy may remain out of sight. That is, until they are noticed, and their suppression ceases to be involuntary – as in the episode on the train with the old man described by Genet. It is only on the perception of unperceived confluences joining the Other that the Ego, previously unabashed – “se posant comme sa propre origine – incréé – principe souverain, prince” (*HdH*, p.89) – can notice the broader relationships which underline, and therefore challenge, the founding of the self on the self. The experiences described in *The Brothers Karamazov* are too traumatic to obviate the discovery of unexpected others; this necessitates a redrawing of the boundaries of sovereign space, and requires changes in being. After all, ignorance and confusion as well as temptation and egoism can determine behaviour. For this reason, we do not consider the ‘luciferian lie’ which says that Good and Evil are contemporaries to be, as Brody writes, a piece of “pulpit fervour”⁷⁶, but instead as a complex imperative: that we

⁷⁵ Donna Brody, ‘Levinas and Lacan: Facing the Real’, *Levinas and Lacan: the Missed Encounter*, ed. Sarah Harasym, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p.67.

⁷⁶ Donna Brody, ‘Levinas and Lacan’, p.73.

should look behind the dramas forming the world, and seek the dialogic moments which form the erotic relationship to the exterior, moments stretching out between others, both as part of the Other, and as the annexation of others to the self. The results such a pursuit produces, far from “rehabilitat[ing] the axiological bipolarity of Good and Evil”⁷⁷, instead, when read in the context of *The Brothers Karamazov*, become highly un-Manichean and deserve to be analysed further.

Ivan has been irresponsible in his discourses to such an extent that from Smerdyakov’s point of view it was Ivan who had been Luciferian, first as the Tempter, and then later as the Accuser, on his three visits to him on his sick bed.⁷⁸ It is therefore perfectly consistent with a Levinasian reading of the ‘Luciferian lie’ to see Smerdyakov as a victim, who has destroyed himself, as well as in the guise of perpetrator. Alyosha has been sent by Zossima to find Dmitry. He first tries his father’s house and meets Smerdyakov who scornfully tells him he is not Alyosha’s brother’s keeper.⁷⁹ Alyosha finds Ivan and receives the same answer, though Ivan recognises the irony, and feels caught out in front of Alyosha.⁸⁰ Others to indict themselves in this fashion are Dmitry, Perkhotin and Rakitin⁸¹. However, Alyosha, who spends all his efforts in caring for others, is also indicted, as although he could not be said to deny he is his brother’s keeper, he twice keeps the wrong brother, once before the murder by staying with Ivan for the Grand Inquisitor poem instead of seeing Dmitry, and again by visiting Dmitry in prison

⁷⁷ Donna Brody, ‘Levinas and Lacan’, p.73.

⁷⁸ “Fancy a clever man like you trying to pull my leg like that!” Smerdyakov to Ivan. (*BK*, p.731)

⁷⁹ “What makes you think I know about Mr Dmitry Karamazov’s movements?” Smerdyakov replied quietly, in measured tones and with a scornful air. ‘It isn’t as though I was his keeper, is it?’” (*BK*, p.264)

⁸⁰ “But what about Dmitry and father? How will it all end?” Alyosha asked anxiously.

‘You’re still harping on it! What have I to do with it? I am not my brother Dmitry’s keeper, am I?’

Ivan snapped irritably, but suddenly he smiled bitterly.

‘Cain’s reply to God about his murdered brother – eh? Perhaps that’s what you’re thinking now, aren’t you?’” (*BK*, p.270)

⁸¹ These other examples have been gathered by Alain Toumayan in “I more than the others”: Dostoevsky and Levinas’, *Yale French Studies* 104, *Encounters with Levinas*, ed. Thomas Trezise (Yale: University of Yale Press, 2004), 55-66 (p.60).

instead of Ivan who is beginning to lose the dialogic battle with the devil.⁸² This is one of the perils of living in a plural world, as betrayal becomes difficult to avoid. Genet chooses to be playfully critical:

Et Smerdiakov?

Parce qu'ils sont quatre, les trois fils Karamazov. Le tendre, le chrétien Aliocha n'a pas une parole, il ne fait pas un geste indiquant que ce larbin est son frère. (ED, p.216)

Alyosha is not able to calm Dmitry or to properly reach Ivan, ultimately failing, as Levinas puts it in *Totalité et infini*, to 'adjourn the moment of betrayal'.⁸³ But is failure to prevent betrayal the same as betrayal? Yes, if it is known about in advance, and is therefore to some extent voluntary. Yet there are millions of injustices that take place which are known about and yet at the same time are allowed to escape our gaze and agency. This, Levinas tells us in 'Transcendence et hauteur' is the nature of the hierarchy of the State, which even when it functions perfectly from a rational point of view, may create suffering by restricting the individual's access to justice, such that, "[i]l y a [...] des larmes

⁸² He goes to the dying elder who asks him. 'Have you been home and seen your brother?' The paragraph continues:

It seemed strange to Alyosha that he asked so firmly and precisely about one of his brothers only – but which one? So it was for that brother that he had perhaps sent him out yesterday and today. 'I've seen one of my brothers,' replied Alyosha. 'I'm talking of your elder brother to whom I bowed down to the ground yesterday.' 'I only saw him yesterday,' said Alyosha. 'I could not find him today.' 'Make haste and find him. Go again tomorrow and make haste. Leave everything and make haste. Perhaps you'll still be in time to prevent something terrible happening.' (BK, p.334)

And then later, once again, after visiting Dmitry in prison we read, "He should really have gone to see Ivan first thing in the morning". (p.702)

⁸³ "La liberté consiste à savoir que la liberté est en péril. Mais savoir ou avoir conscience, c'est avoir du temps pour éviter et prévenir l'instant de l'inhumanité. C'est cet ajournement perpétuel de l'heure de la trahison – infime différence entre l'homme et le non-homme – qui suppose le désintéressement de la bonté [...]". (Tel, p.5, Telb, pp.23-24)

qu'un fonctionnaire ne peut pas voir".⁸⁴ This can only be overcome, as Levinas goes on to say, by "la responsabilité infinie de chacun, pour chacun, devant chacun."⁸⁵ And yet here it becomes necessary to evaluate the relative invisibility of suffering between different social strata. Even the individual obsessed by responsibility discovered from within his or her own misery, may not act radically enough to avert disaster. Such is the case when Dmitry sends Alyosha from the prison to "[l]ove Ivan" (*BK*, p.701), but no-one is sent to "love" Smerdyakov. Smerdyakov is, it appears, an effect of injustice as well as a cause, making his position in the book highly problematic. Dostoevsky runs concurrently the vigilance of individuals with the injustice of hierarchy, refusing a deterministic explanation of Evil which would argue that Smerdyakov could not have behaved otherwise. In so doing, Dostoevsky avoids flattening out the dramas producing the events. Rakitin is planning an article on Dmitry in this vein, "with a political tendency" (p.690), arguing that Dmitry too was a victim of his environment, and that his case is not so much a question of right or wrong, as the symptom of an overarching social issue. This is an approach to general suffering, but not one which interests itself in the suffering of individuals, or in the capacity of individuals to notice this suffering. How then do the brothers approach suffering?

In Dmitry's dream about the starving baby, whom he affectionately refers to as "the babby", he manages through his own passivity at the hands of his interrogators to face the problem of others' powerlessness in suffering. He, unlike Ivan, is able to relativise his guilt, and he understands that it is all of humanity to whom he is responsible. His declaration echoes Zossima once again: "And so I will go to Siberia because of that 'babby,' *since everyone of us is responsible for everyone else*. [...] I didn't kill father, but I accept the guilt and I must suffer."⁸⁶ (My emphasis) From the impetus of the *il y a*, therefore, his appreciation of the

⁸⁴ Levinas, 'Transcendance et hauteur', *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie*, 3, 1962, 89-101, repr. in *Cahier de l'Herne: Lévinas*, eds C. Chalier and M. Abensour (Paris: L'Herne, 1991), p.105.

⁸⁵ Levinas, 'Transcendance et hauteur', p.105.

⁸⁶ We reproduce Toumayan's quotation. The passage is found on *BK*, p.694 in the Magarshak edition.

Other evolves, and his behaviour changes meaning, a noise that was always present in him, is picked up by a new acoustic:

You see, I never had all these doubts before, but it was all hidden inside me. Perhaps it was just because all these ideas were raging inside me without my being aware of it that I drank and fought and raged. (BK, p.695)

Ivan also has ethical feelings for humanity in general and is able to right some former wrongs, though in spite of the messianism of the 'Grand Inquisitor' poem, the wrongs he addresses do not stretch very far into the past. On his way to the third interview with Smerdyakov he meets a singing drunk, knocks him down and abandons him unconscious in the snow, even commenting, "He'll freeze to death!" (p.729) The disgust he arouses is absolutely consistent with that of Genet faced by the old man in the train who, like the drunkard, is an undesirable one would not automatically want to help. Yet, upon realising through Smerdyakov that he had left his father to die, he immediately hears the song of the drunken peasant run through his mind, as a reminder of someone he is leaving to die in real time. (p.732) His failure over his father in the past reminds him of a current failure, opening a glimpse of humanity through a retrospective engagement with the drunkard. Able to help the man, he then stumbles into self-awarded *bonté* and congratulates himself on his philanthropy, paying for his treatment using the newly transferred booty "with a liberal hand". He even draws the conclusion that it is only because of his resolution for the following day that he had helped the peasant. He believes this to be altruism or *bonté* rather than a utility function, as he reassures himself, "how well I'm still capable of analysing myself".(p.744)⁸⁷ On returning to his lodgings, however, he delays making a statement, only then to lose his self-possession:

⁸⁷ Strangely, Toumayan finds caring for the drunkard to be an uncomplicated awakening of moral consciousness in the non-present Third, rather than an act of displacement performed by a conscience still grappling with guilt. Toumayan, 'I more than the others', p.58.

He knew that he was ill but he was loath to be ill at this time, at these approaching fateful moments of his life, when he had to appear in court, when he had to put his case boldly and resolutely, and '*justify himself to himself.*' (p.746, my emphasis)

Even in the act of kindness to the drunkard, followed by the noble undertaking of giving evidence, there is the distinct danger that Ivan will return to internal considerations of himself. He knows more than he thinks, and, after the interview with the devil, involuntarily predicts Smerdyakov's suicide before it is announced by Alyosha. (p.766)

So what of the "babby" that triggered this reflection on universal responsibility? Mitya likes to hear "babby" pronounced in the peasant way because "there seem[s] to be more pity in it". (p.595) Perhaps, as Dmitry explains, "All of us are 'babbies'". (p.694) However, Smerdyakov is most particularly alluded to here by Dostoevsky. It is, after all, he who has had the most unfortunate parenting of the four brothers, and for whom least responsibility has ever been taken. He is the son of Fyodor Karamazov and 'Stinking Lizaveta', a homeless mute who died in childbirth, leaving her infant to be taken in and trained up as cook. Smerdyakov reacts badly to the sentimentalised compassion of those who pity him. He even interrupts a serenade to denounce the reminiscences people liked to address about the "wee" mother to the little "babby", now grown up:

she was four feet tall and a *wee* bit over. Why say a *wee* bit, when she might have said a *little* bit, like everyone else. Wanted to move me to tears I suppose [...] (p.262)

The author ironically re-echoes one of his own most successful manoeuvres in the description of universal need and responsibility in the "babby" by having such an infant grow up to be a murderer. Thus Dostoevsky discourages a sentimental approach to others' suffering, demonstrating instead the difficulty of action. It has

transpired that none of the three brothers has defended the fourth. Alyosha is silent, Ivan triggers his suicide, and Dmitry, who can suffer for the “babby” in the Steppes, cannot tolerate Smerdyakov in the scullery.

Let us summarise these complex movements. We have argued in turn that the passing of the Other is indeed effective in creating moral awakening, but have nuanced this by describing the manner in which multiple Others may obscure the just path. If there is infinite responsibility to the Other, but multiple others, then it is possible that we can find ourselves in a position of betrayal, whereby the more demanding other is forgotten. This may be reflected in tradition, both in its ossification into structures, and the betrayal of the individual within those structures. This play between the active and the ossified is strangely redolent of the *Dire* and of the *Dit*, of the movement of preoriginary proximity into accepted and recognisable language. (*AQE*, pp.6-7, *AQEb*, pp.16-17) Objectivation as society in both its good and bad senses is expressed by Genet as a connection between words in the individual and in the communal, which is both formative and deformative:

Si tradition et trahison sont nés d'un même mouvement originel et divergent pour vivre chacun une vie singulière, par quoi, tout au long de la langue, se savent-ils liés dans leur distorsion? (*EMD*, p.17)

The link between tradition and treason ‘in their distortion’ lies in the singular trajectories of meaning that come to confront one another in language before losing their distinct origin, as they are edified into tradition, or buried in its foundation. Thus a poetic event is created out of words, upon which Genet comments in an interview: “[i]l en faut au moins deux”. (*ED*, p.232) Such confrontation may be the breath of profferation acting within poetry, or there may be physical confrontation with its own allure and power to fascinate. Faced with the choice, however, Genet replies, “je choisirais l’expression poétique par des mots.” (*Ibid.*) Confrontation between words, it is implied, allows something to take place which is reducible neither to tradition (e.g. the canon), nor the betrayal

of alterity; instead, the crossing of traces may create something new outside of tradition, or reanimate the claims of the other.

Treason, therefore, does not mean that the Other is “endogenous to being”; that is, internally caused by being, as Brody claims.⁸⁸ If the assembly of being is begun from an origin of illeity, then it will be translated into that which may be comprehended by tradition, which is the *Dit*, though once again be reanimated into part of the *Dire*. In this sense, translation is not reducible to betrayal, just as the other is not reducible or endogenous to the being to which it is contiguous. Rational necessity is not the ultimate origin of being and the self; these are instead matters whose principles philosophy would like to grasp. This origin is instead “un *en-deçà*, un pré-originel, un non-représentable, un invisible et, par conséquent, un *en-deçà* supposé autrement qu’un principe n’est supposé par la conséquence dont il est synchrone.” (*AQE*, p.203, *AQEb*, p.249) To read the Other as endogenous to being would be to read the cause synchronically with the result that follows it as a principle, rather than as emanating from the “*en-deçà*” or hither side, which is a blind spot in our ability to observe. To confide oneself to a principle would lead to the loss of outside variables and unexpected forces, which ‘control theory’ in the hard sciences accepts may not be fully identifiable, meaning that a system may never be fully stabilised. ‘Observability’ is a related problem, as the complexity of a state may not be fully inferred from the incomplete nature of the measurements available. Unexpected forces, like the Other, may create an irruption in the system. Such questions preoccupied Valéry in his ideas on production, as we shall argue in the next chapter. Illeity, which lies outside the system, is therefore part of a subtle overlapping of forces whereby the weaker force that does not impose itself, can, at times, be stronger than the strong force of tradition or power, causing a *clinamen*, or bending, of the subject. (*TaS*, p.260) Because the beyond being is not yet affiliated to being it may have a highly disruptive effect on a society, if the previous unproblematic identification with its organisations, like Rashkalknikov’s identification with his plan, is interrupted.

⁸⁸ Donna Brody, ‘Levinas and Lacan’, p.69.

The Smerdyakov-Ivan example is especially complex because their meeting has resulted in the shadow of the Other fleeing between them, bringing to mind people they thought uninvolved or unimportant; Ivan understands that he had approved the sacrifice of Dmitry, while Smerdyakov re-evaluates his partnership with Ivan which made him believe in the plan as providential. So what went wrong in their initial interaction? As Levinas tells us, the Other is found in the trace of God who has passed: “Aller vers Lui, ce n’est pas suivre cette trace qui n’est pas un signe. C’est aller vers les Autres qui se tiennent dans la trace de l’illéité.” (*HdH*, pp.69-70) The God who has passed, we are told in ‘Dieu et la philosophie’, is not an identifiable individual, not the first or absolute “autrui”, nor “autrui par excellence”, but “autre qu’autrui, autre autrement, autre d’altérité préalable à l’altérité d’autrui, à l’astreinte éthique au prochain, et différent de tout prochain, transcendant jusqu’à l’absence, jusqu’à sa confusion possible avec le remue-ménage de l’il y a”. (*DVI*, p.115) This multiplication of others makes betrayal unavoidable, as one cannot at the same time be responsible to all and to a particular other. That Smerdyakov had his imagination dominated by a violent plan, and should explicitly refer to the plural terrain of the Third in the singular as God to Ivan, seems to suggest an encroachment of the *il y a* into illeity, since God should not be present and identifiable, nor a direct interlocutor.⁸⁹ Smerdyakov seems instead to be enthralled by the transcendence of a single criminal escape route, as opposed to being opened into communication with others beyond himself.

The interruption performed by the infinite, rather than the subjugation we have just described, follows two stages. Firstly, transcendence does not embody a single other who requires sacrifices to be made. Instead, my obsession with the individual is betrayed in the name of the claims of others; hence, “La relation avec le tiers est une incessante correction de l’asymétrie de la proximité” in “un arrêt où se trahit ma relation an-archique à l’illéité [...]”. (*AQE*, p.201, *AQEb*, pp.246-47) While it is true that this suspension of infinite responsibility means that my

⁸⁹ For God as a direct interlocutor see the film *Breaking the Waves*, Dir. Lars Von Trier. October Films. 1996.

link to illeity is betrayed for a society of others, a new relation is opened with this society, as “« Grâce à Dieu » je suis autrui pour les autres.” (*Ibid.*, *Ibidb*, p.247) Characters in *The Brothers* experience great difficulty with this second interruption, which opens into questions of personal responsibility for shared justice, in so far as the ‘thanks to God’ is also a thanks to the fellow human being. Not only does Ivan fear the judicial system may have a Grand Inquisitor at its head, but he already blames himself entirely for the murder, such that he would find it difficult to subject himself to others’ judgement. Smerdyakov also finds this late appeal to community to be too risky, as he is already convinced he is being defrauded and set up. It is very difficult, therefore, for them to subject themselves to justice. Cynicism on the one hand, and despair on the other, prevent the deflation of the divine into interpretable commandment in service of the other, which leads to the “retournement du sujet incomparable en membre de société.” (*AQE*, p.202, *AQEb*, p.247) The necessary betrayal of total responsibility requires not the “wallowing in the infinity of my betrayal” (*TaS*, p.309), but a new relationship based on the hope of justice for myself. (*AQE*, p.202, 205, *AQEb*, p.247, 205) And yet it is just this intoxication by betrayal which leads to Ivan’s insanity and Smerdyakov’s suicide. To take a neighbouring example from Genet in *Les Bonnes*, Claire commits suicide, and Solange defiantly waits for the police, neither of them able to conceive of life without Madame, choosing instead to stay in what Visker has called “the epicentre of an infinite sacrifice”: one through self-immolation, the other through acceptance of fate, waiting for the arrival of the police. (*TaS*, p.310) This refusal of all rights is a similar egoism to staking the right to find the self in the self, and indeed the two are explicitly combined in Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, who chooses to deceive humanity against his better inclination, and in Genet’s novels in which force and transgression are worshipped to the detriment of the narrator.⁹⁰ Genet’s way of founding himself

⁹⁰ Infinite responsibility can also be evaded in a manner described by Arendt, by which, if I am responsible for everything, then I am responsible for nothing, since the problems are too great for remedy through my engagement. (Chapter 3, *On Violence*, New York: Harvest, 1970) Thinking of Rashkaltnikov or of Kirilov in *The Possessed*, it is possible that someone in despair over a situation

against society, his resistance to a “retournement” or reversion into one of its members, shows the refusal of grace, which is the favour not of a privileged link to the divine but in being connected to others who allow there to be justice for me as well, and therefore for responsibility to be withstood. Such a refusal is made by a subject that wishes to maintain its separation in isolation. Yet it is unclear to what extent Genet is holding a sharable vigil for those in isolation, albeit in many cases an isolation they have imposed on themselves, and to what extent he himself is dramatising his own personal, antisocial rebellion. In either case, there is for people an unavoidable experience of being and also something that sets the subject apart, since the subject in the world remains always separated, while separation needs must already exist in the world. *The Brothers Karamazov* will provide us with further insights.

4. Egology and betrayal

Faced with imminent family drama, Alyosha, the youngest Karamazov, is sent from the monastery by Zossima: “you will go forth from these walls, but you will live in the world like a monk.” (*BK*, p.334) Levinas formulates this antithetical idea of the anchorite in the world as “l’anachorète du Moi en Soi” (*AQE*, p.148, *AQEb*, p.183). This serves to build on earlier formulations of enclosure in the *il y a* by discerning a bond of contemplative closure, which is at the same time on the threshold to the beyond of being. Separation in the world lies in the endless questionings and inversions the self operates within the linear, smooth and imperturbable progress of being. Before the subject can find itself in itself in a constituted Ego, it is headed off on the hither or near side of its identity by something otherwise than being, producing a contemplative solitude even within the social world.

could take refuge in the hypocentre of an infinite sacrifice, in which one’s agency is abdicated in the very act of engagement: such as in the extreme solution found by the suicide bomber.

Levinas's generalisation of the anchorite as part of the structure of the subject envisages separation, therefore, as an event. The gap between the me and the not-me is such that anachoresis is at the point of inversion or substitution in relation to the phenomena that tug at its vestments. After Zossima's death, Alyosha leaves the coffin vigil and, seized by a strange mood, responds to Rakitin's cajoling, and goes for a glass of champagne at Grushenka's, where the inversion in the flow of being results in him almost having his cassock turned inside out as well (like a glove one might say), until his sheer modesty touches his hostess. Anachoresis is not a finished, affiliated political or ecclesiastical Ego in relation to counterpart Egos whose function is set.⁹¹ Anachoresis cannot succeed or fail in relation to the not-me, as it is on the near side of activity and passivity, after involvement in a phenomenon and before action. (*AQE*, p.148, *AQEb*, p.183) If anachoresis itself does not fail, then the piloting subject, on the other hand, can, as it has to thematise what is beyond being and enter into social praxis between the *for-itself* and the *for-all*. Only then can redemption (*rachat*) find purchase.

Ivan demands expiation for all, but has also argued that if there is no beneficent order or God, then everything is permitted. This is what the Inquisitor practices. But this compulsion has come at an immense cost, because the Inquisitor's "correction" of Christ's work in the abolition of sin has necessitated him bearing the pain of deception and the burden of humanity's sins himself. This "charge" is so onerous as to render him sovereign. This can be illustrated using Genet's formula from *Haute surveillance*, in which Yeux-Verts complains that he carries "tout le poids. De quoi je ne sais pas." (*GTC*, p.6) There is, however, a hint in the next line as to what the burden may be, as the inmate is not the 'King of Kings', but the 'Thug of Thugs', "le Caïd des Caïds qui la supporte pour le monde entier." (*Ibid.*) Apart from his place at the top of an equivocal hierarchy, everything would suggest he was speaking about the weight of sin, though as a death row prisoner, he may equally be speaking of his punishment. Whereas

⁹¹ Derrida in *Politiques de l'amitié* speaks about "la communauté anachorétique" whose prerequisite is separation, if not isolation, in "l'amitié des solitaires et la chance à venir de la philosophie nouvelle." Derrida, *Politiques de l'amitié*, (Paris: Galilée, 2004), p.53.

Yeux-Verts had attempted every course of life before becoming a murderer, and accepts his guilt, the Inquisitor's identity is gnawed by grief but not remorse (*remorsure*), and remains intact. (*AQE*, p.161, *AQEb*, pp.198-99) Rashkalnikov's responsibility for the other leads him to murder; the Grand Inquisitor's responsibility leads him to tyranny. But whereas Rashkalnikov reforms, the intellectual defect in the Inquisitor is so ingrained that he retains the impression of acting for humanity; his anachoretic relationship with the Ego is not successfully interrupted by the other, and yet the Ego remains, "comme faite de sainteté."⁹² This is why Ivan confers a tragic, though at the same time saintly status upon the Inquisitor for having so seriously misjudged his vocation, and for persisting in defiant separation.⁹³ It is the grasp of this enclosure within the self that makes the other's heterological appeal undesirable. As Genet comments from prison, "Libre, c'est-à-dire exilé parmi les vivants." (*ND*, p.205) The consciousness of this contempt for others, which is also expressed by the Grand Inquisitor, leads to the conviction of holding a position beyond being and its moral laws, mentioned above by Bataille. (*LM*, p.147) Just before the episode in which Divine allows a neighbour's child to fall to its death, Genet writes, "Contrairement à la plupart des saints; elle en eut connaissance." (*ND*, p.198) This sainthood as such is manifestly false, and yet provocative elements of iconographic sainthood have been assembled to confuse the reader's response as usually incompatible universes resonate one within the other, creating a fragmentary excess of meaning in alterity. In Dostoevsky we have learnt that illeity, in the manner of dissemination rather than polysemy, is other than all describable others ("autre d'altérité préalable à l'altérité d'autrui" (*DVI*, p.115)), such that, incapable of being pinpointed, responsibility is instead radicalised.

⁹² Levinas, 'Transcendance et hauteur', p.106.

⁹³ In *The Adolescent*, Arkady Dolgoruky continues gambling with the ruined Prince Sokolsky:

"But the baseness? But the meanness of the act?" the prince asked suddenly.

"That we're going to play roulette? No, that's everything!" I cried. "Money is everything! It's only we who are saints [...]" *AD*, p.324. He argues that an honest recovery of the situation would be so arduous as to render their wrecklessness a kind of asceticism.

We have already seen the connection between Smerdyakov and the “babby”, but there is another point in the text at which the failure to recognise the claims of a vulnerable child are reflected upon in the context of the failure of man’s love for mankind generally. This is in Ivan’s collection of moral anecdotes in which a civilised society is seen to disgrace itself. Since it is possible for people inexperienced in love to reject the other because of their appearance, he takes the example of children, the one tenth of humanity whose innocence holds a special appeal and represents no barrier to affection. Ivan then identifies the vulnerability of the child itself as that which most inflames the abuser: for in the eyes of the child the abuser himself is part of the Providential universe, something in which the child still believes, where Good has priority over Evil.⁹⁴ A little girl has been locked in the privy all night, and still cries out to God to protect her. (*BK*, p.283) Ivan’s next example is drawn not from the tenth of humanity whom it is possible to love, but from elsewhere, from the most difficult sections of society, the criminal minority. He tells of a Genevan brochure in which there is a story of a child given by his parents to some shepherds “as a present”, even though they are not good shepherds. Like the prodigal son, Richard would have liked to eat the pigs’ food. He escapes his captor foster parents and lives by banditry, heading then to the city where he commits murder, like Notre-Dame-des-fleurs, killing an old man. It is only then that society takes an interest in him; he repents and is converted to Christianity. He writes to the court declaring his guilt, and explaining that God has given him “grace”.⁹⁵ They behead him nonetheless: “Yes, yes, Richard, die in the Lord. You’ve shed blood and you must die in the Lord.” (p.280) He cannot be made to revert to society, never having known it, while to

⁹⁴ That is Providence, rather than merely the “persécution innomable” that Laplanche flags in the book of Job. Jean Laplanche, *Entre séduction et inspiration: L’Homme*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), p.166.

⁹⁵ There are two passages in Genet which borrow from this brochure described by Ivan, which we will examine further in Chapter Two. Genet mentions a newspaper article which tells the story of an old woman, who having spent a lifetime caring for a disabled daughter, arrives at the end of her tether and sets fire to the house. If Richard is given “grace” in execution, the old woman is “sauvée” by her appearance and condemnation at the courthouse. (*JV*, p.30) The execution of Notre-Dame also comes to mind, at whose trial the defence had been so bad that the jurors were deprived even of the pleasure of overcoming their pity. (*ND*, p.193)

invoke the Lord, here, is not to give thanks for the trace of God shepherding the lost back through conscience, but to mark someone out for death.⁹⁶ That Richard too should confuse this God with the bounty of heaven is a scathing indictment of the mercy of the society to whose power he must submit. This can be seen as a form of perverse sovereignty on the part of the society, which is killing one of its own, turning absolute responsibility for the other into their absolute sacrifice.⁹⁷

Transgressive sovereignty means that a child may be martyred like a criminal, a criminal may not receive a fair trial, and that an innocent group or individual, like Christ Himself, may be executed. In the trial scene in *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs* the child criminal is himself figured as the Redeemer, but other expiatory victims are also listed by Genet, as Notre-Dame shares in their glow and is “revêtu d’un caractère sacré, voisin de celui qu’avaient autrefois les victimes expiatoires, qu’elles fussent bouc, boeuf, enfant, et qu’ont encore aujourd’hui les rois et les Juifs. Les gardiens lui parlèrent et le servirent, comme si, le sachant chargé des péchés du monde, ils eussent voulu attirer sur eux la bénédiction du Rédempteur.” (ND, p.194) Of all these, it should be firmly remarked, Notre-Dame is the only criminal. However, since in 1942 Genet could have had no firm knowledge of the Final Solution, he seems to display a remarkable prescience in this list, through his association of ‘kings and Jews’ with the common criminal. Furthermore, this opens out into a discussion of the criminality of Christ, the King of the Jews, in his play *Le Bagne*, to which we shall now turn our attention.

The Chaplain is talking with the Director and is confused over his decision to give Forlano the death sentence for a crime of which the Director is almost certain Forlano is innocent. The Chaplain intuits that the prisoner’s troubling pride and beauty have a part to play in this, but approves the difficult choice before drawing an unexpected comparison, “Si le Christ avait été encore – et était encore un affreux petit juif, chétif... rabougri... bossu... cul de jatte...”, then the

⁹⁶ This story, then, is inscribed in a Christianity which is a continuation of tragedy, rather than a possibility of Redemption, or Providence. It is also significant that Richard is brought up by shepherds, as was Oedipus.

⁹⁷ This tendency towards the avoidance of assignation through the volunteering of another Levinas describes as “sacrifice humaine”. (AQE, p.162, AQEb, p.201)

Crucifixion would not have presented any difficulty or retained any significance. (*GTC*, p.808) The “s’il avait été encore” implies that the view of Christ as a dying Jew has since been changed. The Director counters, in case the Chaplain is missing the point, that Christ’s dominant characteristic was his innocence rather than his appearance, on the grounds that “il n’a pas commis de crime...”. But the chaplain rejoins:

L’AUMONIER: Des blagues! Pas de crimes, lui! Et son suicide sur la croix qu’est-ce que c’est? (*GTC*, p.808)

To think of Christ’s death on the cross as a suicide is to think that the victim of sacrifice accepts his end as a direct and logical consequence of his own actions, in the same way that a criminal accepts the punishment handed out for their crimes. If the crime meriting execution is suicide itself, then there would be no need for communal guilt on the part of the community, and no infinite responsibility, as someone has volunteered themselves already to both accept guilt and to be sacrificed, as though by their own hand.

In ‘The Grand Inquisitor’ poem Ivan argues that on Christ’s second coming, his immolation by a hostile society will be repeated, in a sovereign assertion against Christ. As Bataille puts it:

La souveraineté est le pouvoir de s’élever, dans l’indifférence à la mort, au-dessus des lois qui assurent le maintien de la vie. Elle ne diffère de la sainteté qu’en apparence, le saint étant celui qu’attire la mort, tandis que le roi l’attire au-dessus de lui. (*LM*, p.134)

By calling death upon themselves, Genet and his characters represent for Bataille “une *souveraineté dérisoire*” (p.129). We take, for example, the moment at which, while the judge is making half-hearted noises about rehabilitation, Notre-Dame interrupts him by saying, “Non, pas la rélévation, je préfère claquer tout de suite [...]” (*ND*, p.194) While this sovereignty may be derisory, Bataille goes on to

describe Genet's inverted saintliness as "la plus profonde". (*LM*, p.134) In the unrepentant criminal, transgressive sovereignty is outplayed, and is replaced by Genet's saintliness, which Bataille has gone on to call 'betrayed' or 'dead' sovereignty. (p.154)⁹⁸ The independent, extra-human life of sovereignty does not allow for error, and is above common ethical principles. And yet this false sovereignty contains strains of real saintliness, blurring identity. When Notre-Dame-des-fleurs is beheaded, nothing happens, no visible outcry human or otherwise. (*ND*, p.194-95) His death is unmarked, except by Genet. Thus a criminal for whom all hope is impossible finds himself in the trace of the martyr, from the Greek *martyris*, meaning sacrifice. Métayer is executed by a gang of fellow prisoners, having been wrongfully accused of being an informer. In a despair involving a kind of vertigo he exclaims:

- On fit aussi cela au Christ!" (*MR*, p.415)

This is not a derisory comparison but instead asks an essential question: can responsibility be taken for those who are historically, or personally, compromised? This is why Genet allows the criminal and the devotional universes to contaminate one another.

Another way of posing this question is to ask whether the wrongdoer or persecutor also has a face, something to which Levinas answers in the affirmative in *Entre Nous*, even in the case of a member of the SS. (*EN*, pp.243-44) Genet compares Métayer to Christ, and then settles into a description of the uniqueness of his facial features, in a precursor description to those in the aesthetic texts, "Le visage resta là devant moi. Et la ressemblance s'en échappait." (*MR*, p.415) The flight of his likeness is a prototype to the substitution described above in 'Rembrandt déchiré', in which identity flows through the eyes. And yet there is an intermediary version in *Pompes funèbres* in which the SS member, Erik, crouched on a roof amongst the chimneys in the last days of the Occupation, plays a French

⁹⁸ Bataille writes, "c'est la souveraineté *confisquée*, la souveraineté morte, de celui dont le désir solitaire de souveraineté est trahison de la souveraineté." (*LM*, p.154)

tune on his harmonica: “Il avait conscience que par ses yeux s’écoulait toute la douceur triste de la France.” (PF, p.50) While feeling sad in response to sadness is not remarkable, this is a sadness shared with the enemy. Genet’s use of the same ethical description for the undesirable on the train as for the persecutor who can harm from a position of hiding, imposes a difficult view of responsibility as permanently unresolved. It is to such hyperbolic lengths that Levinas also carries the problem.

Genet reformulates this position of a permanently unresolved responsibility taking his cue from the general failure in fraternal duty of the three brothers, as well as of the illegitimate servant, in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In his posthumous piece from which we have already quoted, he follows his observations up with an intention, “Je voudrais parler de Smerdiakov. ” (ED, p.216)

It transpires that he had already been speaking about him in conjunction with others, and at times borrowing his voice through adaptations in his writing, for most of his career. On the one hand, Genet identifies with Smerdyakov as an orphan and criminal, who from his position as underdog serves, from the very opening of the novel, other people’s bad intentions. And yet, as we have already commented, the difficulty presented by this rogue element is what links Zossima and the devil in Ivan’s consciousness; that is associating the need for universal responsibility to the need for universal justice and expiation, at once for those already suffering and for the wrongdoer. Thus it is Smerdyakov who forces us to integrate an angelic reading of Levinas (involving responsibility to everything and everyone) with the obsessional Luciferian reading, which seeks to extirpate the lie of the contemporaneity of Good and Bad, a lie which must be brought before justice. There is a sensitivity to the Smerdyakovian inflection which occupies both Levinas’s and Genet’s writing, as they are each aware of the danger of confusing volition with ethical choice. At the same time, they both recognise that in the failure of self-sufficiency there is the impulse towards a mutually constituted world which is ethical in nature. Rashkalnikov with Sonia, Genet with his fellow passenger, Ivan arguing with the devil, and Smerdyakov in total solitude – all

realise the possibility, agonising because (as yet) unrealised, of shared community in an opening to the Other, which may fill the subject with dread just as much as with hope. Smerdyakov, for his part, finally decides that this opening is impossible, and rather than remain a prisoner of himself, chooses to die by his own hand.

The Smerdyakovian moments in Genet's oeuvre are an integral part of the dialogism of his technique as a whole, drawn between solipsism and the possibility of community. Bakhtin argues that "[i]n everything that is secret, dark, mystical, to the extent that it could exert a defining influence on *personality*, Dostoevsky saw *violence* destroying the individual." (PD, p.297) The insights that are offered by this obscurity emerge, then, from artistic reproduction in a more or less opaque writing. It is darkness that is productive of art, interrupting forms, creating ellipses, and throwing different objects or literary subjects into relief. As Levinas says of painting in *De l'existence à l'existant*, "Si paradoxal que cela puisse paraître, la peinture est une lutte avec la vision. Elle cherche à arracher à la lumière les êtres intégrés dans un ensemble." (DEE, p.90) When we approach these shadows with a critical light, rather than dispersing the shadow, we seek to offer literary silhouettes up to one another, to observe their similarity and transformation, and to make out kinship and difference. Perhaps this is why Genet commented of his theatre that it sought to create "une ombre fraîche et torride". (EMD, p.16) It is also worth pointing out that while phenomenology is derived from the Greek *phaon*, meaning light, from 1947 onward Levinas argues that light is the conditioning of being and knowledge, and that his enquiry consists in the places or beings which escape, occupying the dark rifts between the rays of knowledge, serving to call the subject into question. If an exteriority is phenomenologically irreducible and cannot be made, by the agency of the subject, to shine in a good or a bad light, fixing, thematising, stabilising, then these shadows, which may be very dark indeed, still conceal a relation to the Other; albeit one that hovers between betrayed sovereignty and confused saintliness.

Genet twice made the scandalous assertion that he was pleased at the German occupation of France. Now, at the time, this could easily have resulted in

his recidivist thievery ending in a life sentence, which during the occupation would have been transmuted in its turn to deportation to a concentration camp. Perhaps there are some extra valencies of meaning we do not pick up at first. Let us look at what Genet says again, firstly interviewed by Hubert Fichte:

Le fait que l'armée française, ce qu'il y avait de plus prestigieux au monde il y a trente ans ait capitulé devant les troupes d'un caporal autrichien, eh bien ça m'a ravi. (*ED*, p.149)

And once again ten years later, to Nigel Williams:

Ravi! Ravi! Je détestais tellement, et encore maintenant, tellement la France, que j'étais ravi que l'armée française soit battue. Elle était battue par les Allemands, elle a été battue par Hitler, j'étais content. (p.301)

The assertion, it transpires, is a reinflection of a speech Smerdyakov makes in *The Brothers*.⁹⁹ If we go back to the serenade, immediately following his denunciation of picturesque and unrigorous sympathy, he exclaims, "I hate all Russia my dear." (*BK*, p.262) Genet adapts Smerdyakov's description of the Napoleonic invasion of Russia into judgements on the German invasion of France.¹⁰⁰ His provocative celebrations refer closely back to Smerdyakov's avowal:

It would have been a good thing if them Frenchies had conquered us. A clever nation, my dear, would have conquered a stupid one and annexed it. Things would have been different then, my dear. (p.262)

⁹⁹ Dominique Eddé also notices the adaptation in *Le crime de Jean Genet*, Seuil, Paris, 2007, pp.40-41.

¹⁰⁰ Hitler and Napoleon are, of course, only similar in terms of the building of an Empire; in terms of disregard for life, only Hitler held extermination itself as a goal.

It is worth repeating, then, that this is not a nude conceptual assertion, but a reinflection of what another interiority might think.¹⁰¹ It displays once again the derisory sovereignty pointed out by Bataille in which domination even of oneself or one's nation is welcomed. In Smerdyakov, therefore, for whom others can be sacrificed without qualms, it is not surprising that Providence may be found in unsuspected quarters. But whereas Smerdyakov holds the above opinions unproblematically, Genet, by using varidirectional speech, places himself, to quote Visker once again, deliberately "in the epicentre of an infinite sacrifice". (*TaS*, p.310) The passage created by a fictive *Je-Tu* spanning different historical moments can thus open a dialogue between dead protagonists, and even between a book character and an author-character. Smerdyakov will never succeed in opening his restaurant in Paris, only in starting a vocab book found later next to his sickbed. A Frenchman, Genet, on the other hand, escapes deportation and continues writing amongst the living.

Levinas tells us that in the passivity of suffering, one suffers even for the fault of the persecutor, "Ma souffrance est le point de mire de toutes les souffrances – et de toutes les fautes. Même de la faute de mes persécuteurs, ce qui revient à subir l'ultime persécution, à subir absolument." (*AQE*, p.150, *AQEb*, p.186) This involves an absolute suffering in its non-sense, pointing back to the ultimate sense of anachoresis that is responsibility outside one's liberty and present. (*Ibid.*, p.81,108, *Ibidb*, p.105,136) It is not by accident that Smerdyakov and Ivan should suffer persecution by the Accuser, because the relationship to being, as Levinas tells us, is in the accusative: "L'incarnation du Soi et ses possibilités de douleur gratuite doivent être comprises en fonction de l'*accusatif* absolu du Soi, passivité en deçà de toute passivité au fond de la matière se faisant chair." (*Ibid.*, p.150, *Ibidb*, p.186) This is to say that suffering inhabits being itself, which the subject must materially assume in the flesh. In this sense, it

¹⁰¹ This is not the only use that is made of comparisons with Napoleon in Genet's and Dostoevsky's works. In *The Idiot*, Ganya's mythomaniac father, General Ivolgin, claims to have been Napoleon's mascot and to have dissuaded him from prolonging his campaign to occupy the Kremlin. (*ID*, p.536-542) This faith in being able to effect the political through the personal is dramatised in *Pompes funèbres* when the *milicien*, Riton, is sent to entertain the Führer in his bunker. (*PF*, pp.100-106)

would be easy to associate the loss of the buffer zone of thematisation protecting the subject with the traumatism of the heterological *en-deçà*, as here the fact of being headed off on the near side of one's identity by an alterity (which will replunge us into being once more), could not help but leave the impression of the destruction of the *en-deçà* itself in the spreading of the *il y a*. Thus through incarnation, the subject relates the Other *au-delà* or *en-deçà*, hither or thither being to being. Since it is the Other which informs our attitude to being, it is worth asking whether Ivan and Smerdyakov sense the beyond of being from their position of crisis? If *le Bien* is an-archic, then so too may be *le Mal*, in its two understandings as evil and as suffering. These may each be untamable and produce a descent into the *il y a*, which Levinas describes as a “descente vertigineuse vers l'abîme”. (*Tel*, p.66, *Telb*, p.94) This can equally be characterised by the expression “trans-descendence”; although as Visker points out, only the ascendent part of the term's coupling is used in Levinas.¹⁰² In the chapter ‘Transcendance et Mal’ from *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, Evil is described as “le non-synthétisable, plus hétérogène encore que toute hétérogénéité soumise à l'embrassement du formel exposant l'hétérogénéité dans sa malignité même.” (*DVI*, p.198) But in spite of this radical malignity, the Other may still be found or searched for in the transascendence of the Good, like the little girl Ivan describes calling out to God for help. Levinas better defines this point of contact between the Other and God through suffering in *Autrement qu'être*:

il faut apercevoir dans le caractère anarchique de la souffrance – et avant toute réflexion – une souffrance de la souffrance, une souffrance « à cause » de ce que ma souffrance a de pitoyable, ce qui est une souffrance « pour Dieu » qui souffre de ma souffrance. Trace « anarchique » de Dieu dans la passivité. (*AQE*, p.150, *AQEb*, p.186)

¹⁰² Levinas uses the term in *Totalité et infini*: “Le mouvement métaphysique est transcendant et la transcendance est nécessairement une transascendance.” Levinas cites this as a borrowing from Jean Wahl, ‘Sur l'idée de la transcendance’, in *Existence humaine et transcendance*, (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1944). Referenced in *Tel*, p.5, *Telb*, p.24; *TaS*, p.238.

In this way, God may be both “dead” and conspicuous by His absence without forcing us into the use of negative theology. In this way, suffering *from* the evil done to the Other can become a suffering *for* God in the guise of all others. Thus, responsibility for the other and the third may enter a state of isolated suffering, stirring thoughts of the Infinite, as the suffering which afflicts the subject in its pitifulness is understood as afflicting the Good and illeity in general.¹⁰³ The God of suffering, therefore, cannot at the same time be the substantiated God, “protecteur de tous les égoïsmes.” (*AQE*, p.205, *AQEb*, p.251) Dmitry, in prison after having been convinced by Rakitin of the determinism of science, returns to the fear that everything may be allowed, the conviction that brought him to the very brink of murder when he heard it from Ivan in the first place. His new undertaking to suffer for the “babby”, he explains to Alyosha, is also fuelled by a new despair, which he qualifies with the following unexpected words:

“[...] I’m sorry for God, that’s why!” (*BK*, p.690)

This idea of a responsibility to the Other in God was already exploited by Dostoevsky in ‘Stavrogin’s Confession’, a chapter of *The Possessed* not included in the original edition.¹⁰⁴ Tempted by evil acts, Stavrogin accuses Matryosha, the fourteen-year-old daughter of his landlord, of theft, and later violates her. Convinced she has committed a mortal sin, she later becomes delirious, raving repeatedly in her sleep, “I killed God”. (*SC*, p.54) God as a victim begins to assume a more complex character in the unformed mind of Matryosha. Unlike the girl locked in the privy described by Ivan, who still believes in a pre-existing good, Matryosha, “blaming, of course, herself alone”, in Stavrogin’s words, believes that the beneficent order has been destroyed by her. (*SC*, p.66) The confusion at wanting to protest against a wrong for which she herself feels

¹⁰³ Even dying on the cross, Christ’s, “My God my God, why have you forsaken me” (*Matt* 27.45-47), is a quotation from another’s despair in *Psalms* 22.1, and is therefore also an entreaty through another’s suffering.

¹⁰⁴ This is included in the annex to the Pléiade edition, while we are using the first English translation edited by Virginia Woolf.

responsible leads her to suicide. The status of the adult in this situation is as the guardian of ethics, for they, as Ivan writes, have “eaten the apple and know good and evil and have become ‘like gods’”. (*BK*, p.278) If we accept that Stavrogin was like a god set next to the girl’s innocence, then upsetting the reign of the good has meant melding it with a capricious and violent adult order. To return to the shepherd Richard, the god he is introduced to by the socialites seems to be similarly pagan, as suffering for it results in bondage and death. (p.280) These gods are pagan gods, which, rather than confronting the subject with an order in which they are responsible, remove their freedom, compel and dominate.

In Dostoevsky’s *Poor People*, Makar Devushkin is rescued from destitution by the charity of the General, the head of his office. He is so grateful that he instructs Varenka, his correspondant, not only to remember him in her prayers, but insists: “you may not pray for your natural father, but you should pray every day and forever on behalf of His Excellency.”¹⁰⁵ The use of the capitalised title, as well as the association with prayer, already alert us to the quasi-divine status that a superior may have in deciding people’s futures. Makar goes on to approve even of his superior’s capricious behaviour later in the text, when it has become evident that his boss is not only beneficent but also a faulty human being: “His Excellency has been good enough to be strict as well, and got very angry with Yemelyan Ivanovich...”. (p.125) There is only a short distance between this kind of veneration and Genet’s description of an unjust world. If for Makar Ivanovich, God can pass by in the form of a General, then it is not surprising that for Divine, “Passa l’Eternel sous forme de mac.” (*ND*, p.15) As Levinas argues, the death of a kind of God is not in dispute. (*AQE*, p.121, *AQEb*, p.152) What is of special interest to us, however, is the ways in which negative and positive transcendence are linked, and in Levinas more particularly, the way in which negative transcendence may bear positive transcendence. However, a state of affairs may come to be, as for Matryosha and Richard, in which suffering for God may obscure the true source of suffering. Like Makar and Divine, Matryosha and

¹⁰⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Poor People*, trans. Hugh Aplin, (London: Hesperus, 2002), p.110.

Richard are both in a position of exceptional poverty, and may attribute anyone of higher rank or sturdier demeanour with virtues which they do not actually possess. Vigorous forms of resistance to this kind of thinking, however, may emerge.

In the third tableau of Genet's *Les Paravents*, Leïla is insulted by Saïd who curses their marriage. He protests that to his, the poorest and lowest family, the Orties, has been added the ugliest wife. During Saïd's diatribe, Leïla adds first, "Seigneur, je vous en prie, bouchez vos oreilles, ne l'écoutez plus!", and then, "Seigneur, Seigneur Dieu ne l'écoutez plus, il vous ferait mal!" (PA, p.185) The pain she experiences is her pain, but felt for another. The intercession in the name of the Other or God here is so direct as to arrive before even the God of petition who, in His turn, is older than the indicative God, to whom attributes are given. (DVI, p.227)¹⁰⁶ It seems highly likely that the suffering of Leïla is developed in part out of the suffering of Matryosha, as Leïla (at least to begin with) can refuse tyranny and a union with transgressive transcendence. However, the upheavals of abuse, eviction, imprisonment and revolution lead her increasingly to pursue her marital union through betrayal.¹⁰⁷ Saïd and Leïla's later reconciliation comes at a point when they both leave the land of the living, unwanted – half forced (like Sonia), half out of choice (like Rashkalknikov) – and turn exclusion into exclusivity:

Je sais où nous allons, Saïd, et pourquoi nous y allons. Ce n'est pas pour aller quelque part, mais afin que ceux qui nous y envoient restent tranquilles sur un rivage tranquille. (PA, p.288)

¹⁰⁶ This is unlike the God of the Cadi who gives judgements which are neither constant nor infallible ("Dieu s'en aille"), neither is it like the God conjured up by Mrs Blankensee in the play, whose great-grandmother and father, of the generation of the first settlers, granted themselves a subtle but decisive increment of latitude in moral matters over the colonised. She describes the thrill of sexually consummating their marriage on the night before their wedding, in order to show that, "l'amour était plus fort que Dieu." (PA, p.215, 260)

¹⁰⁷ This recalls Blanchot's observation in *L'Entretien infini* that in a position of exhaustion with no chance of recovery, the bad infinity of the neutral is indistinguishable from the infinity of the Other detected in separation. Through this bad infinity itself an exit is sought: "nous pressentons, aussi bien, que si la douleur (ou la fatigue et le malheur) creuse entre les êtres un vide infini, ce vide est peut-être ce qu'il importerait le plus, le laissant vide, de conduire jusqu'à l'expression, au point que parler par fatigue, douleur ou malheur, pourrait être parler selon la dimension du langage dans son infinité." Maurice Blanchot, *Entretien infini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p.111.

For them, betrayal may have taken place in a confusion whereby disaffiliation from their nation creates an intimacy, or derisory honour amongst thieves. However, their disappearance, like that of Smerdyakov, is not purely cynical, but born from the disorientation that afflicts the oppressed. The author-narrator's betrayal in *Pompes funèbres*, on the other hand, is not that of one who is already a total outcast. The crossing over to the other shore had to be deliberately worked at. But, at the same time, the appeal of the Good, detected in Evil as transgression, remains intact:

On sait l'ordre contenu dans ma douleur: faire ce qui est bien. Mon goût de la solitude m'incitait à rechercher les terres les plus vierges, après ma déconvenue en vue des rivages fabuleux du mal ce goût m'oblige à faire marche arrière et m'adonner au bien. (*PF*, 126)

A certain kind of repentance means that a change in direction is brought about upon hearing the order of the Good which, Levinas remarks, "évoque la « *felix culpa* » et flatte notre goût du pathétique, notre sensibilité nourrie de christianisme et de Dostoïevski." (*DL*, p.98) This sensibility in and of itself is, however, insufficient, as there are some, Genet tells us, for whom repentance is impossible. He continues a few paragraphs later to explain:

Après avoir connu votre interdiction de séjour, vos prisons, votre ban, j'ai découvert des régions plus désertes où mon orgueil se sentait plus à l'aise. Après ce travail – encore à moitié fait – qui m'a coûté tant de sacrifices, m'obstinant toujours plus dans la sublimation d'un monde qui est l'envers du vôtre, voici que j'ai honte de me voir aborder avec peine, éclopé, saignant, sur un rivage plus peuplé que la Mort elle-même. *Et les gens que j'y rencontre y sont venus facilement, sans danger, sans avoir rien coupé. Ils sont dans l'infamie comme un poisson dans l'eau [...]* (*PF*, p.128, my emphasis)

Although he cuts himself off from the Good deliberately, he affirms the existence of those who have lost the impression of any difference between the two shores, and were seemingly made by nature for such an environment. The impasse Genet reaches on discovering the naturally wicked renders worthless his hard won solitude. This is why the discovery of a naturally evil world is, in the first quotation, left behind in the call or commandment of the good, and replaced by an aspiration which is cultural. Genet states, “je n’ai plus, pour gagner la solitude, qu’à faire marche arrière et me parer des vertus de vos livres.” (*Ibid.*) This expresses the return of a kind of order through cultural adaptation, and it is here that Genet becomes highly problematic, as he causes his sources to operate unexpectedly, often inclining them by ‘virtue’ of his writing towards evil in the confusion of the call of good. As referred to in the introduction, transcendental reduction operated by people generally may be considered not as objectivation, but instead as “society”. However, these readings, as we have seen in the disappearance of Smerdyakov and Saïd, also reveal moments at which society, in the pursuit of ‘tradition’, may produce moments of ‘betrayal’, through act or omission. These may also be discovered in a literature open to being read disinterestedly, in which the choral work of society can be read from different angles, and perhaps even produce the ‘denunciation’ Genet describes in ‘Rembrandt déchiré’, placing him in the path of a responsibility of which he was previously ignorant. The adaptations Genet produces are, therefore, highly dissonant routes through the self-bound princely or sovereign subject, and their place both in society, typifying the Same, and on society’s margins in the antisocial, criminal, or badly integrated. Genet thus stages a confrontation between the Same and the Ego in the name of a profound reconsideration of the future of society based on separation and sacrifice, in which the sacrifice of the other is flagged as both widespread and scandalous.

While it would be difficult to wake from the spell of Genet’s writing, as Alyosha does during Ivan’s telling of ‘The Grand Inquisitor’, and say, “But your poem’s in praise of Christ!”, since in Genet there is no Ecclesiastical affiliation,

what we are given instead is an insight into the mind of the *raskol'nik* (*QDL*, p.97, 98), from the Russian *raskol*, meaning the schismatic or the dissident. Rather than hoping that Alyosha will be persuaded by Ivan, or us by Genet, we are instead subjected to an eloquent confrontation of themes fashioned from fragmentary language and address. If as Ivan says, "it's not you I want to corrupt and push off the firm foundations on which you stand, it's me, perhaps, that I'd like to be healed by you" (*BK*, p.276), then we must remember that just as the healing of Alyosha did not reach Smerdyakov, the absolutely Other remains always out of reach. The apparent absence of Smerdyakov from Alyosha's world would serve to position the traitor opposite the young Apostles whom Alyosha unites at the end of the novel.

If one is responsible for everything and everyone, and as Zossima comments, oneself more than all others, then expiation for the suffering caused by the persecutor will demand a dramatic effort to understand the suffering that has taken place, so that no tear should be lost, and "aucune mort se passer de résurrection." (*DEE*, p.155) This must equally be partnered by a political effort which assumes responsibility for the persecutor in historical wrongdoing, which does not originate in our own present. For these reasons, the relationship of Self and Ego with the exterior is a primary stage on which human trials are acted out, and, indeed, take place. The shared structure of the subject is a possible such starting point.

Chapter II: The animation of the inanimate trace

1. Speech, writing and the trace

Derrida's 'Violence et Métaphysique' is a critique of Levinas's conception of radical alterity. Derrida asks whether Levinas may have gestured towards an exteriority which upon expression cannot remain beyond ontology, because necessarily expressed in the philosophical presuppositions of Ancient Greek, the language and discourse of theme and concept. Derrida appreciates that the trace which Levinas puts in the place of the concept to disorder meaning functions as "le dialogue et le trajet vers l'autre", and cannot be comprehended or comprised in the logos or in absolute knowledge:

Cette incompréhensibilité, cette rupture du logos n'est pas le commencement de l'irrationalisme, mais blessure ou inspiration qui ouvre la parole et rend ensuite possible tout logos ou tout rationalisme. (*VeM*, p.145)

Levinas describes the face as language, both in the sense of facial and bodily expression, and speech – for the face says its hunger. (p.148) The ability of the subject to come to the aid of its speech, frequently commented upon by Levinas (p.150)¹⁰⁸, leads Derrida to ask whether the trace of illeity, the absent Other in an unidentified third person, would instead be more readily carried by writing:

Le « Il » dont la transcendance et l'absence généreuse s'annoncent sans retour dans la trace n'est-il pas plus facilement l'auteur de l'écriture que celui de la parole? (p.151)

¹⁰⁸ This is derived from *Phaedrus*, 275e, "written words", p.97.

And yet to be meaningful writing requires some kind of living speech (“la parole vive”), outside its own horizon for otherwise, it is merely a grammar or a lexicon without language, which one might describe as a code incapable of any form allowing the ‘dire’. (*Ibid.*) Derrida then argues that if writing, despite this, is allowed to occupy a sequentially secondary position, then:

c’est en Dieu seulement que la parole, comme présence, comme origine et horizon de l’écriture, s’accomplit sans défaillance. (*Ibid.*)

The fully present speech of God would serve as origin and horizon to a writing without lacunae, because it would need no back-up, being a fully interpretable archive of traces and inscriptions. However, since God could not be called back to presence in speech, to help out signification (since for Levinas, the absolutely Other is uncontaminated by being), then writing could in any case only ever occupy a sequentially secondary position, but now in the sense that nothing can be discerned to have taken place beforehand (“rien pourtant n’a lieu avant elle”). (p.152) In *Autrement qu’être* the *dit* is said to resonate in all art, in the propositions it awakens and causes to resonate “en guise d’exégèse”. (*AQE*, p.53, *AQEb*, p.71) The resonation of essence, however, does not rejoin an initial moment of originary voice, but contains traces of Saying absorbed in the narrative of the Said. (*Ibid.*, p.55, *Ibidb*, p.74) Writing, then, is the *dit*, through which the oblique strokes of the *dire* may run, rather than a dictation made and taken straight from the divine.

Derrida thus gestures to the boundary in Levinas’s thought which he will be testing: the boundary between an absent *autrui* in the *ab-solu*, and a present *autrui* in the other – the other with which one is confronted: someone present, yet in the trace of God. Blanchot’s affinity with Levinas, Derrida writes, would cease at the point when “le neutre se détermine” (*VeM*, p.152), notably in the manifestation of the *Il* through the *tu*. This does not express a simple wish on the part of Derrida to catch out the author of *Difficile Liberté*, who is not unused to addressing difficult questions in new and difficult ways; but instead a wish to

refocus the results of Levinas's work on alterity on social questions. Derrida questions the way this presence or non-presence of the *Il* in the *tu* is brought into contact with the exteriority of an undecidable, questioning world, a

[c]ommunauté de la question sur la possibilité de la question. C'est peu – c'est presque rien – mais là se réfugient et se résument aujourd'hui une dignité et un devoir inentamables de décision. Une inentamable responsabilité. (p.118)

Once again, it is a matter of bringing this pursuit of the question posed on behalf of the other into the present which poses the problem, as a particular other or flagship cause would necessarily ontologise and narrow the goal of representing the Other generally. How can this community of the question, which is as yet unarticulated, and unformed, find itself, since it is, at present, the aspiration to, rather than the enunciation of, a new order; it is at the stage of

cette fragile instance où la question n'est pas encore assez déterminée pour que l'hypocrisie d'une réponse soit déjà invitée sous le masque de la question, pour que sa voix se soit déjà laissé articuler en fraude dans la syntaxe même de la question. (*Ibid.*)

The 'hypocrisy of a response' brings to mind Diouf, the false-black in Genet's *Les Nègres*, who suggests that Village, who is responsible for the articulation of the black community, "se repose dans la parole." (*NE*, p.100) Is Levinas compromising the aspiration of the 'community of the question' when he hears the other man in the trace of God? Derrida writes:

Levinas a commencé d'entendre une réponse. Cette réponse s'appelle encore attente, bien sûr, mais cette attente ne se fait plus attendre. (*VeM*, p.152)

Expectation lies in the relatedness of the other to all others in the trace; and yet, contends Derrida, Levinas no longer feels obliged to await this connectivity, as it is partially named in a “contexte théologique”: an interpretation Levinas would reject. As Visker explains, Levinas’s ultimate preference for the term “God” over the term “Good” is designed to reconcile the problem of the unseen others in the Third which open always to an elsewhere. This serves to preserve politics from the violence of an idea the sacred might impose through total recognition of the Good in one person or place, since, in monotheisms at least, the intangible non-ontological nature of God does not admit description through being. (*TaS*, p.257, 266, 269) On the other hand, a relation to the other through God allows the grace of being an other amongst others who share my responsibility, even though at the same time the subject is subjected to a plurality of commandments in the Other, who both flees and remains.

Derrida’s is a double reading, both within the text and against the text’s *vouloir-dire*. He will later, in *Donner la mort*, produce a further highly condensed double reading of Levinas’s thought which indicates more clearly the ontologising risks run by Levinas, which Derrida previously outlined in ‘Violence et Métaphysique’. If we follow Derrida’s inversion and read the phrase “Dieu est tout autre” as “Tout autre est Dieu”, we get the meaning firstly that *God is absolutely other*, but also that *Every other is God*. (*DLM*, p.121)¹⁰⁹ This unworkable ambiguity turns attentiveness to the Other into the claim to incarnate the Other; just as the “se veut: l’un-l’autre” does in ‘Rembrandt déchiré’, examined in our previous chapter on page 59.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ It is rendered more symmetrically in David Wills’s translation, “Every other (one) is God,” and “God is every (bit) other.” Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.87.

¹¹⁰ One can hear ‘Tout autre est tout autre’ in *Donner la mort* as a part response to Levinas’s ‘Tout autrement’ in *Noms Propres*, in which there is a redoubling of the double reading of the critique of logocentrism in ‘Violence et Métaphysique’. (Critchley follows the argument closely in 4.2 of *The Ethics of Deconstruction*.) Levinas observes of Derrida’s style that it too inevitably makes logocentric use of the verb ‘to be’ in present tense predicative statements, and that this could be used to contest the results of a particular deconstruction. However, he then draws a parallel with refutations of scepticism, to the effect that “d’abord terrassé et foulé aux pieds, le scepticisme se relevait pour revenir en enfant légitime de la philosophie.” (*NP*, p.85) For Levinas this recovery applies at once to critiques of deconstructionism, and to his own critique of Western philosophy in

John Llewelyn examines the double reading in ‘Violence et Métaphysique’ by questioning what exactly Derrida means by ‘the hypocrisy of a response’. Llewelyn reads it as hesitation between conventional hypocrisy, implying a moral order to which behaviour does not adhere, and “hypoCrisy”, which is a crisis: one which imposes a criticism of Criticism; or a criticism “hither criticism”; a criticism pronounced on the near side of criticism, and which has a disordering effect in the imagination, as it attacks the modes of questioning hardwired in the consciousness which have produced such a response. (*HI*, p.124) For a response to recognise itself as dangerous, or to recognise the crisis on which it itself verges, is itself highly significant. So in the first hypocrisy, the *Il*, perhaps deliberately, is confused with the *tu* in order to pass off volition as ethics, and this takes place within the subject through the latitude the subject grants itself in the name of self-interest; in the second conception, however, hypoCrisy puts the problem of interest at stake, not only horizontally between interest groups, but vertically between two orders in a chiasmic induction of the problem of ‘désinter-esse-ment’. That is to say that disinterestedness is noticed as something beyond the margins of the self-interested subject. An occurrence takes place in which there occurs to the subject or comes to mind a command which is not directly prescribed by the immediate conditions of being. This is a movement from the order of being to that of the beyond being, in uprightness, or ‘droiture’. HypoCrisy’s verticality can, therefore, also be related to problems of trans-ascendence and trans-descendence, and forms part of the intrigue of the infinite in the effort to differentiate them. The ‘hypocrisy’ referred to by Derrida is therefore endowed with a double resonance: hypocrisy and hypoCrisis; moreover, this latter term is endowed with a doubleness of its own, as in recognising the danger of duplicity a glimpse of prophetic time may be gained. As we saw in the case of

Totalité et infini. So we are at a kissing-gate between different readings: *Totalité et infini* upsets Western philosophy, whose return Derrida predicts; Levinas returns to the argument of *VeM* in ‘Tout autrement’ to question the permanence of the reordering offered by deconstruction, and ‘Tout autre est tout autre’ by Derrida arrives to upset ‘Tout autrement’, questioning the habitability of ‘the wholly otherwise’. However, since these are double readings they each circulate both inside and outside one another’s enclosures.

Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor in the previous chapter, this dual doubleness seeks both Truth and the Good, neither of which can be brought to full presence. Levinas explains in *Totalité et infini*:

Il est peut-être temps de reconnaître dans l'hypocrisie, non seulement un vilain défaut contingent de l'homme, mais le déchirement profond d'un monde attaché à la fois aux philosophes et aux prophètes. (*Tel*, XII, *Telb*, p.9)

Levinas addresses this difficulty in large part through the stylistic depth and breadth of his writing. As Derrida explains himself in a footnote to 'Violence et Métaphysique', there may be a reluctance – necessary to all criticism, one might say – to engage with Levinas in quite the same philosophical-stylistic manner as Levinas himself seems to require:

[D]ans *Totalité et Infini*, l'usage de la métaphore, pour y être admirable et le plus souvent, sinon toujours, au-delà de l'abus rhétorique, abrite en son pathos les mouvements les plus décisifs du discours. En renonçant trop souvent à les reproduire dans notre prose désenchantée, serons-nous fidèle ou infidèle? (*VeM*, p.124)

The question of fidelity is essential to the matter of the essay as Derrida looks at the way Levinas follows and departs from Husserl and Heidegger. Derrida investigates whether radical alterity was not already recognised by Heidegger in the ontological difference (p.202); while a similar argument contends that the notion of analogy in Husserlian phenomenology also leaves the other free of objectivation. Derrida's line of argument is therefore that the venturing of the absolutely Other and its attendant risks may already have been obviated by two related thinkers who also recognise alterity. Derrida reads Husserl, at the stage the latter has reached in *Cartesian Meditations*, as presupposing the consciousness of other selves through the consciousness of an individual's own past life:

L'étranger est infiniment autre puisque par essence aucun enrichissement des profils ne peut me donner la face subjective de son vécu *de son côté*, tel qu'il est vécu par lui. (p.183)¹¹¹

This, in short, already resembles Levinasian asymmetry, which is transcendental rather than empirical. Derrida continues:

L'égoïté de l'autre lui permet de dire « ego » comme moi et c'est pourquoi il est autrui et non une pierre ou un être sans parole *dans mon économie réelle*. (p.184)

In this reading of Husserl, the other figures in my transcendental economy, at least as a counterpart ego. This is something that Levinas had cast doubt on in his *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, in which he explained that although naturalistic ontology, privileging representation, had already been critiqued, the natural attitude persisted in so far as the phenomenological reduction remains purely theoretical. This continuation of the naturalistic viewpoint in what one could term as a coating with the pale caste of thought, acts so as to threaten the transcendence of the other, Levinas tells us: for the other could be reduced in the same way as an inanimate object, he takes the example of a rock. Such a procedure would be empirical and not transcendental, with the result that its entry into consciousness would involve a conscious but inaccurate representation. With regard to consciousness and personality, Levinas emphasises that it is the temporal and the historical in the human which are "la substantialité

¹¹¹ We might clarify this point with a comment by Valéry, first brought to my attention in an article by Éric Marty: "On peut dire: 'Je pense A et je trouve A faux', mais on ne peut pas dire: 'Tu penses A et je trouve A faux.'" Éric Marty, 'André Gide et Paul Valéry: Le grand malentendu', *Gide-Valéry: Correspondances, Bulletin des études valéryennes*, 95 (Nov 2003), ed. Frédéric Canovas, 131-141 (p.137). Marty is quoting and commenting on the letter of 25 October 1899 from Valéry to Gide: in *Correspondances d'André Gide et de Paul Valéry 1890-1942*, preface and notes by Robert Mallet (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p.360.

même de sa substance.” (*THI*, p.221) The substance of consciousness, then, is made in a relationship to time through individual histories:

Il s’agit de ce phénomène *sui generis* dans la constitution de la personnalité, qui fait que l’homme a cette manière toute spécifique d’être son passé, inconcevable s’il s’agissait d’une pierre. (*Ibid.*)

By putting these quotations together, we can construe the supra-historicity of Husserl’s onlooker as that of someone as unresponsive as stone. But as Derrida argues, if it were the case that the onlooker were really outside history, then he would not be able to recognise objects from his own past-life. It is because he can correlate that he can conceive of symmetry, a symmetry without which there could be no asymmetry and therefore no other. (*VeM*, p.188) So, although the ahistorical subject viewing an ahistorical object could together be seen as inert as two pebbles, the dimension of a time accompanying the idea of the other, who may or may not be absolute, has been outlined between the two thinkers. The notion of the trace which follows in Levinas’s ‘La trace de l’Autre’ – to which Derrida would have liked to have made more reference in ‘Violence et Métaphysique’, as he explains in the essay’s first footnote (p.117) – develops the notions of diachronic time and asymmetry, which serve to bring the subject under a responsibility without dominating that subject.

It is conceivable, then, that even a stone, in its ability to evoke the other, may be implicated in the alterity and diachrony of the trace. Levinas comments in ‘La trace de l’Autre’ on the difference between a pebble inscribed by a person, which could be a trace, and another that has been striped naturally. (*HdH*, p.281)¹¹² If we allow ourselves to apply Levinas’s own example more broadly with reference to his later writing, it is conceivable that the striped pebble as a trace of the other could, in a sense, speak to me before I am able to designate it as *tode ti*, that is as a particular case in a genre, because it is irreducible to any

¹¹² One might observe that a Cherokee would interpret the stone striped by nature (or indeed without a stripe) as also being redolent of the Other.

‘essence’, ‘genre’, or ‘resemblance’. (*AQE*, p.109, *AQEb*, p.137) That is to say that before I could identify this pebble as just another rock among rocks, I would already have been called to service through the someone that has inscribed the stripes; by the one who moves in, rather than is caught by, the trace of the Other.¹¹³

In his commentary in ‘Violence et Métaphysique’, Derrida describes Levinas’s style as more ‘œuvre’ than treatise in its inter-modulation of different philosophical inflections:

le développement des thèmes n’est, dans *Totalité et infini*, ni purement descriptif ni purement déductif. Il se déroule avec l’insistance infinie des eaux contre une plage: retour et répétition, toujours, de la même vague contre la même rive, où pourtant chaque fois se résumant, tout infiniment se renouvelle et s’enrichit. (*VeM*, p.124)

Rudi Visker comments on this style in which he detects a great attentiveness on the part of Levinas to the inflection and reinflection of particular words and terms. It is in relation to such a lexis that Derrida signals his possible infidelity. Visker points to what is at stake in such stylistic decisions on the part of Levinas and also Derrida:

Although all of these waves look alike and are often described by Levinas with the same word, they are in fact very different. Overlooking these differences can be fatal; it will inevitably mean that one finds oneself caught up in the midst of the intrigue of what Levinas calls ‘the infinite’ at the very moment that one thinks one has found an exit. (*TaS*, p.235)

¹¹³ My brother Jonny once pressed his ear to a fermenting tangerine that whined in the sun with a look of alarmed concentration; and on another occasion answered a concerned ‘yes’ to a sheep bleating the other side of a hill that he thought was calling my name: “Tahaam, tahaam!”. It is therefore possible, as we shall later argue in more detail, to be subpoenaed by the non-human.

That is to say that the question of the infinite that is being put may not be heard in its full complexity, and that therefore, in addressing the possibility of the community of the question, the unaware reader may miss the subtle difference being alluded to in Derrida's formulation "[c]'est peu – ce n'est presque rien". (*VeM*, p.118) As we saw above, this is where Derrida formulates the community of the question seeking to question ontology, a community which has "an unbreachable dignity and duty of decision".¹¹⁴

Visker is referring to the difficulty of discerning the *il y a* from *illéité*, which occupied the latter part of our argument in Chapter One. Derrida calls for critical attention to be paid to the status of *Autrui*, especially in terms of language and metaphor. Study of the dual inflections of words which function to describe both "ilya"-ity, and illeity, will be paramount.¹¹⁵ We shall explore these differentiations now in relation to the central notion of transcendence.

As Visker remarks, Jean Wahl's problematisation of trans-ascendence and trans-descendence, to which we now return having approached it in Chapter One,¹¹⁶ may be very usefully applied to Levinas's notions on positive infinity and the *il y a* to show the role the *il y a* plays in the intrigue of the infinite.¹¹⁷ At this point in his oeuvre, as we have already quoted, Levinas states that "la transcendence, comme désir et inadéquation, est nécessairement une transascendence." (*Tel*, p.5, *Telb*, p.24; our p.102) Although this long predates the essays of his final period – 'Transcendence et mal' (1978), and 'La mauvaise conscience et l'inexorable' (1981), in which Evil is described in its transcendence – the *il y a* is already imbued with a character of excess and immeasurability: "un

¹¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', *Writing and Difference* (1978), trans. Alan Bass, Routledge, London, 2001. p.98.

¹¹⁵ See Visker's and Llewelyn's studies which are able to rise to Levinas's ambi-valent writing with ambidextrous responses. See Llewelyn's eighty term glossary of such terms in *GE*, pp.196-97.

¹¹⁶ We reproduce Visker's note from Jean Wahl's 'Sur l'idée de la transcendence', in *Existence humaine et transcendence*, (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1944), pp.34-56, 113-59. (*TaS*, p.238, n.6)

¹¹⁷ Visker flags Hent de Vries's over-compressed initial association, "there is no ethical transcendence without transdescendence". (*TaS*, p.238) We reproduce Visker's reference to de Vries's essay, 'Adieu, à dieu, a-dieu' in *Ethics as First Philosophy. The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy Literature and Religion*, ed. A. Peperzak (New York: Routledge, 1995) 211-20 (p.214).

mouvement de descente vers un abîme toujours plus profond et que nous avons appelé ailleurs *il y a*". (*Tel*, p.66, *Telb*, p.94) This description follows successive waves of Cartesian doubt verifying exterior objects in the world but in which every affirmation is then in its turn placed in doubt. This creates a sinking movement as more and more exteriority is negated. This experience of the *il y a* is not arrested through the *cogito*, but instead awaits affirmation from the other. To be thus on the verge of nonsense, left to one's own devices, does not necessarily mean entering a quagmire of thought in which affirmation is impossible, but instead being at the pivot between nonsense and the affirmation of the other. The above description of descent, however, in *Totalité et infini*, does confirm the validity of using the term transcendence with regard to Levinas. It would seem to combine productively with the experience of the undesirable becoming the desirable – Genet's episode on the train we described in Chapter One – which rebounds into a transascendence.

A striking example of stylistic ambivalence which fits this equivocal mould is to be found in expressions used to describe the *il y a*, which are also coined to denote positive transcendence. We have only to compare *enchaînement* and *rivage* to pure being, mentioned in Chapter One, with the inability to escape the Other in the status of hostage, to see that bondage and the inseverable bonds attaching to the Other are drawn into comparison. This allows the relationship to the inaccessible other to be coloured in a similar way as enclosure within the self. But the resulting anguish allows the other to be remarked – both noticed and placed – without ontologising that other; a discernment occurs which does not point out, but instead notices "une indication accusant la retraite de l'indiqué au lieu d'une référence qui le rejoint." (*DHH*, p.289) The other is, therefore, able to exert influence without coercion, and yet the doubly inflected figure is strengthened to the point where enchainment to the self has become enchainment to and by the other; to the point where the self is the hostage of the other. It is a form of hyperbole or exaggeration. The emphatic power of the other allows its intrigue to be plotted. As Levinas says in *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, clarifying the technical term of *intrigue*, "L'intrigue rattache à ce qui se détache, elle attache à

l'ab-solu – sans le relativiser.” (DMT, p.231) Thus, the separation of the object described may be respected in both its transascendence and transcendence, despite and because of the fact that some confusion may, as we have argued in Chapter One, exist between them.

There is a literary example in Valéry which sheds some considerable light on these concerns, and which we shall quote at some length. As our starting point we will look at a description of waves in ‘Eupalinos’, in which the Socrates character describes the initial impetus that made him become a philosopher. It bears comparison with Derrida’s footnote in ‘Violence et Métaphysique’:

Je foulais fortement le bord sinueux, durci et rebattu par le flot. Toutes choses, autour de moi, étaient simples et pures: le ciel, le sable, l’eau. Je regardais venir du large ces grandes formes qui semblent courir depuis les rives de Libye, transportant leurs sommets étincelants, leurs creuses vallées, leur implacable énergie, de l’Afrique jusqu’à l’Attique, sur l’immense étendue liquide. Elles trouvent enfin leur obstacle, et le socle même de l’Hellas; elles se rompent sur cette base sous-marine; elles reculent en désordre vers l’origine de leur durée. *Les vagues, à ce point, détruites et confondues, mais ressaisies par celles qui les suivent, on dirait que les figures de l’onde se combattent.* (Eup, pp.155-56, my emphasis)

If one imagines for a moment that this is the single wave in its multiple form which Derrida attributes to Levinas, one can then see that it has been compiled from different places, breaking at the joining point with the East. After contemplating the simple lines of the sky, sand and water, Socrates moves on to the confused repetitions of forms which have become competing figures hitting the “socle” or pedestal of the Hellenic world. Valéry may be considering how what is exterior to the Greek may have influenced the young Socrates. The bi-directionality of the wave is evoked in the next passage, and is reminiscent of Levinas’s ‘Réalité et son ombre’, evoking not only sensation, duration, and descent, but also statuary:

Les gouttes innombrables brisent leurs chaînes, une poudre étincelante s'élève. Ici, l'écume, jetée au plus loin par le flot le plus haut, forme des tas jaunâtres et irisés qui crèvent au soleil [... .] [M]oi, je jouissais de l'écume naissante et vierge... Elle est d'une douceur étrange, au contact. C'est un lait tout tiède, et aéré, qui vient avec une violence voluptueuse, inonde les pieds nus, les abreuve, les dépasse et redescend sur eux, en gémissant d'une voix qui abandonne le rivage et se retire en elle-même; *cependant que l'humaine statue, présente et vivante, s'enfonce un peu plus dans le sable qui l'entraîne; et cependant que l'âme s'abandonne à cette musique si puissante et si fine s'apaise, et la suit éternellement.* (pp.156-57, my emphasis)

The sinking of the 'human statue' in the sand at a moment of pleasure is ominous and might bespeak a submergence into the sensation, after 'sounding with one voice'. The mutism and immobility of the statue against which we are warned by Levinas in 'La Réalité et son ombre' and *Autrement qu'être* will not, however, last long in Socrates' case. (*RO*, p.120; *AQE*, p.191 n.21, *AQEb*, p.235 n.1) He meditates on an object he found and threw back in the shallows, forever since disappeared, which once again for some reason comes to his mind, "Attends donc, et dans quelques mots, je vais trouver ce que je ne cherchais pas." (*Eup*, p.158) He continues:

J'ai trouvé une de ces choses rejetées par la mer; une chose blanche, et de la plus pure blancheur; polie, et dure, et douce, et légère. Elle brillait au soleil, sur le sable léché, qui est sombre, et semé d'étincelles. Je la pris; je soufflai sur elle; je l'ai frotté sur mon manteau, et *sa forme singulière arrêta toutes mes autres pensées.* Qui t'a fait? pensais-je. Tu ne ressembles à rien, et pourtant tu n'es pas informe. Es-tu le jeu de la nature; ô privée de nom, et arrivée à moi, de par les dieux, au milieu des immondices que la mer a répudiées cette nuit? (p.159, my emphasis)

In spite of his thoughts coming to a halt, they soon become active again in the ‘battle of figures’ which follows, as he wonders as to its identity:

C’était peut-être un ossement de poisson bizarrement usé par le frottement du sable fin sous les eaux? Ou de l’ivoire taillé pour je ne sais quel usage, *par un artisan*, d’au-delà les mers? Qui sait? [...]

Ou bien, n’était-ce pas l’œuvre d’un corps vivant, qui, sans le savoir, *travaille de sa propre substance* [...] faisant participer sa nourriture, puisée autour de lui, à la construction mystérieuse qui lui assure quelque durée? [...]

Que cet objet singulier fût l’œuvre de la vie, ou celle de l’art, ou bien celle du temps et un jeu de la nature, je ne pouvais le distinguer... Alors, je l’ai tout à coup rejeté à la mer. (p.160, 163, my emphasis)

Phaedrus then asks whether the relief was immediate, to which Socrates replies, “L’esprit ne rejette pas si facilement une énigme”, and adds, “je me sentais le captif d’une pensée.” (p.164) He also describes the possible resemblance of a natural object to an artistic one. He takes the example of a rock worn by the tide, passing through the family of the forms in order to finally assume the appearance of an artist’s image. As with Levinas’s striped stone, this would leave us unclear as to whether we are contemplating a trace or a natural phenomenon. In either case, however, in this reading the captivity or captivation produced by thought is strongly related to an unknown other.

The child Socrates, who could conceive only of certainties at the time, then develops a certain theory. Whereas the architect uses material for one or two of its qualities, e.g. its durability or ductility, the philosopher attempts to account for all that material’s other qualities invested by nature. The inquiring mind working through observation searches for traces of the object’s possible origins in order to determine its qualities, as to whether it has been the product of a craftsman, a body, a life, of time, art or nature. This confusion of possible origins

also implies that the building of a complete knowledge of an object is impossible, as Valéry also argues in *L'Homme et la coquille*, in which even a seashell may admit of an asymmetry denoting an unreachable alterity.¹¹⁸ If the philosopher's initial pursuit is of *con-naissance*, in the wish to have been present at something's birth, then this desire can only be frustrated, and may perhaps be replaced by wisdom in the thinking of alterity and its impact on the subject. The architect who pursues construction therefore also works from the lessons of wisdom in trying to estimate unknown forces in order to produce a building which is both structurally sound, and fulfils a purpose. In the pursuit of what is simply effective, interrupting or cutting across nature's designs, construction applies knowledge to other ends, fitting an object into human designs, expressing the architect's will through geometrical combination. As Valéry comments earlier in the essay, "chaque figure est une proposition qui peut se composer avec d'autres". (*Eup*, p.143) This is the making present to one another of objects through logos which enables a general combinability of figures, which is then attributed to laws, or figures deduced from laws. (p.134) What is important here with regard to Levinas is that construction, since it factors in only a proportion of the characteristics of the material in question, finds the specialist – Socrates is speaking specifically of the geometrist – at the point where "il a suffisamment considéré la figure", such that he closes "en quelque sorte les yeux, et se fait aveugle". (p.144) On the one hand this expresses the primacy of knowledge Levinas finds and opposes in Hegel. However, while this knowledge – which is bound up in itself and which, past a certain point, makes itself unreceptive to alterity – is prey to "l'aiguillon du désir" (our p.65; *DEE*, p.56), it also assumes the organising powers of a symbolic interregnum. This paradoxical receptiveness to polysemantics is further indicated a little later on: "Cet aveugle admirable se contemple en tant que théâtre d'une chorégraphie savante de symboles!" (p.144-45)

This blind choreography of symbols is little more subject to the geometrist's will than were the competing figures of the wave of primary

¹¹⁸ Paul Valéry, *L'Homme et la coquille*.

impression greeted by the young Socrates, as we examined before. While a 'figure' may be Janus-faced, and a symbol of multiple application, the trace in Levinas is something which signifies by disordering meaning, and resists being attributed to any theme. The rock containing a possible trace of the other, therefore, could not simply be factored into a tier of bricks in a wall, but would itself inspire other thoughts and projects. The 'knowing choreography of symbols' which takes place when the geometrist's eyes are closed concerns a drifting into possibility itself, that which may be only partly predicted or simulated, in a wounding or fissuring of the rationality of logos. For Levinas the trace is a form of face and therefore more heteronomous than a figure or a symbol, as it refers not to possible present or future meaning, but to something immemorially past. This is the point at which the alterity of that which was observed is reanimated by the imagination and the senses; the point at which, as Valéry comments in his 'Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci' (1894), one is reminded not of the marvel on the stage but of the stage's wings. (*VOI*, p.1160)

For Levinas, the utilitarian marking belongs to the world, whereas the trace is of an unknown time; or, if we can borrow Valéry's description of the unidentified object, "le fruit d'un temps infini". (*Eup*, p.161) Knowing where a mark came from, in the case of the artist or artisan, would remove it from infinite time, or from what Valéry also refers to through Phaedrus as "[le] temps indéfini". (p.162) It would make it the effect of a known act or procedure, returning it to the world. Levinas clarifies indefinite time as well as infinite time when he remarks in 'La trace de l'Autre' that the past they occupy cannot be designated:

La trace comme trace ne mène pas seulement vers le passé, mais est la *passé* même vers un passé plus éloigné que tout passé et que tout avenir, lesquels se rangent encore dans mon temps, vers le passé de l'Autre, où se dessine l'éternité – passé absolu qui réunit tous les temps. (*DHH*, p.281)

The uniting of all times is then evoked as part of the extreme yore (*extrême jadis*), a notion which Levinas borrows from Valéry. (p.277)¹¹⁹ The insertion of this infinite time into our present time is of particular interest for our argument. Valéry comments that a mark linked to this infinite time may be discovered in nature, or it may be a form arrived at by an artist, who speeds up this natural process by several millennia. For Levinas the mark must be made by the human. For Valéry, on the contrary, as with Socrates's found object, nature can arrive at such a mark, and give it to be discovered. As with Levinas's mention of one pebble engraving another, Valéry also requires something more than a simple marking endowed with resemblance to behave as a sign of indefinite time. Trace is discovered through the frustration of what could be described as a geometrical reflex on the part of the contemplator before that which evades transcription and measurement, because absented and therefore only partly discerned. (p.138) Such a position is consistent with the trace in Levinas, which is not a depiction of the *tu* taken as a model, but instead a passing or flight of this other in the tertiality of the *Il*, and therefore provides evidence of something unrepresentable. Consequently, we do not contemplate a particular other immobilised in the trace. However, in spite of his positions on aesthetics, Levinas accepts that representations of the human can signify like the trace. But if, as is said in *Entre Nous*, an arm by Rodin, or the nape of the neck may be "faced"¹²⁰, surprisingly, inanimate objects are excluded. (*EN*, p.244) As Llewelyn explains:

Whatever he might allow in the case of a portrait, it would seem that Levinas could not allow that there is any ethical saying in the case of a still life or a landscape painting in which no people are portrayed. (*HI*, p.173)

¹¹⁹ The expression is also quoted in *TelI*, p.145, *Telb*, p.184, and *AQE*, p.134, *AQEb*, pp.167-68. We shall examine Valéry's own use of the expression at the end of Chapter Three.

¹²⁰ The expression "faced" is borrowed from Llewelyn's subchapter 'Being faced' in *GE*. p.63.

But Levinas's comment on the striped rock contradicts this condition of necessary human portrayal; it is not a representation of the human, or by the human. In fact, it is not a representation at all, but merely a mark produced by the human:

Une pierre a rayé une autre. La rayure peut être, certes, prise pour une trace; en réalité, sans l'homme qui a tenu la pierre, la rayure n'est qu'un effet. (*DHH*, p.281)

Ultimately, the contemplator is therefore put in an undecidable position, rather than one of contradiction, unsure of whether they are contemplating an effect or a trace.

The contemplation by the inanimate as by a subject gives Derrida far less trouble in *Glas* than it does Levinas in his work. Derrida turns to the instant of substitution expressed as a flowing through the eyes we examined in the previous chapter in 'Rembrandt déchiré'. Genet asks, "Qu'est-ce donc qui s'était écoulé de mon corps – je m'éc...", and this is quoted by Derrida. (*CQR*, p.23; *Glas*, 53b) This accusative pronominal particle 'm' in "je m'éc..." relates back in 'Rembrandt déchiré' to a "je m'écoulais" or a "je m'étais écoulé". (*CQR*, p.22, 23) Derrida, however, speculates that it may imply an absent "je m'écrivais": the appearance internal to the subject of a grapheme in response to alterity. (*Glas*, 53b) He next elides 'that which writes', and 'he who writes himself' in order to show a possible indistinction between face in the human and face in the inanimate:

Mais les tableaux sont écrits et ce(lui) qui (s')écrit se voit regardé par le peintre. (53b)

'That which writes', and 'he who writes' are each contemplated by the painter, perhaps even in their own canvas in which one may have presumed they had all the initiative. The writing does not know precisely its own subject or object, the

subject or object which writes itself. That which is written does not come to full presence but is contemplated in the same way that two canvases on opposite walls of a gallery may contemplate one another. This is also the form of the painter-writer parallel columns of Rembrandt and Genet in 'Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt...'. That they may react to one another in the exegesis of the contemplator is 'that which remains', that which was hidden or absent, but caught in the trace of the Other is reanimated.

2. The trace in Genet; the *dire* and the *dit* in Levinas

Genet's relationship to the trace, since his first ethico-aesthetic text *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti* (1952), is ambiguous. In this text, the innumerable people of the dead are described as being dead to such an extent that they have never been alive (*AT*, p.8); or, to quote 'Énigme et phénomène', the time of the Other is non-simultaneous to the point that, "le passé de l'Autre n'ait jamais été présent." (*DHH*, p.294) Like the object found by the Socrates character, come from another shore, "le fruit d'un temps infini", Giacometti's statues, rather than speaking, instead solicit a response which disorders the present in which the contemplator stands. (*Eup*, p.161)

In 'Fragments' from 1954, Genet attempts to define an aesthetic based on separation and finitude. These are notions he develops around the approaching death from consumption of his Italian lover, Decimo, who had been chosen to play the part of Forlano in the film version of *Le Bagne*. The progression of the descriptions and musings is highly suggestive in the way it revolves around ideas of trace, absence and inscription. Derrida's comment in 'Violence et Métaphysique' comes to mind, in which he is looking in Levinas for a writing which comes second; but a second place which is not preceded by a spoken enunciation. This will lead Levinas, in *Autrement qu'être*, to problematise the *dire* and the *dit* as the two sides of the amphibological nature of logos, whereby

meaning flickers inside and outside the concept. (*HI*, p.132) We read in ‘Fragments’ the following avowal, followed by a musing on the kind of text which would follow the novels:

À cette époque, après de misérables aventures subies puis transformées en chants d’où je tentais extraire une particulière morale, je n’avais plus assez de vigueur pour entreprendre, comme j’en éprouvais cependant l’intime urgence, une œuvre issue non du fait mais de la claire raison, œuvre de calcul, issue paradoxalement du nombre avant de l’être du vocable, du vocable avant que du fait, se défaisant à mesure qu’elle se poursuivrait. (*Frag*, pp.76-77)

We already mentioned the idea of musical progression in writing in Chapter One, citing Mallarmé. This is developed by Valéry, who, in his second letter to the older poet in 1891, explains his admiration for Poe, who is able to produce “un accompagnement en sourdine”:

Il précise l’écho mystérieux des choses, et leur secrète harmonie, aussi réelle, aussi certaine qu’un rapport mathématique à tous esprits artistes, c’est-à-dire, et comme il sied, idéalistes violents... (*VOI*, pp.1960-61)

Valéry is lauding the ability to produce parallel reaction, prepared in advance scientifically by the poet. This is perhaps a clue as to the prewritten relationship of numbers Genet claims to be aiming for in ‘Fragments’: “du nombre avant de l’être du vocable”. In ‘Eupalinos’, too, geometry or architecture are used to examine human relationships. Much as we might approach the eponymous architect, Eupalinos, who in sixth-century Greece was the first to calculate the excavation of a tunnel from both ends, the text can be read both as a reflection on the technical spirit, and as in some way determining the lines of possible communication between subjectivities. The technical, therefore, automatically impacts upon the human. The mature Valéry returns to the discussion of mathematics, which is a

pure science and therefore universally applicable, in ‘Poésie pure’ of 1928. The governing idea of a mathematical relationship, which he applies to music, is that it should be absolute and true, and not encumbered by content, address or addressee. In music a note leaves the order of sound and will have a definite result, a “résultat certain”. (VOI, p.1462) Genet seems to extend this observation to describe the immense patience with which Giacometti sculpts. Having been lost in his object and its material, the art object produced by his hands becomes a “récompense méritée, mais prévisible.” (AT, p.3) However, as Valéry explains, the relationship of sound and sense makes language too rich in primary properties to be clear or pure, hence the great difficulty of poetry: “Tout le monde sait bien à quelle point est rare les accords *du son et du sens*” (VOI, p.1462) But then the poet is not trying to produce straightforward voice or content, but to create a harmonic relation:

si le poète pouvait arriver à construire des œuvres où rien de ce qui est de la prose n’apparaîtrait plus, des poèmes où la continuité musicale ne serait jamais interrompue, où les relations des significations seraient elles-mêmes perpétuellement pareilles à des rapports harmoniques, où la *transmutation des pensées les unes dans les autres paraîtrait plus importante que toute pensée*, où le jeu des figures contiendrait la réalité du sujet, – alors l’on pourrait parler de *poésie pure* comme d’une chose existante. (p.1463)

The ‘secret harmony’ of which Valéry made mention to Mallarmé in his letter is therefore not literally possible but is a precious analytical idea, through which the relatedness of separated things might be drawn into ‘harmonic rapport’. Each is cupped in the acoustic of the other, in what would be an adverbial rather than adjectival relationship, as their shared resonance is animated by the verbal vibration of being rather than being held in a fixed state.¹²¹ To return to

¹²¹ The notion of sympathetic vibration in music, important in 18th-century erotic literature, comes to mind.

‘Fragments’, then, Genet explains the conclusion forcefully imposed by this aesthetic:

Cette exigence saugrenue s’illustre alors par cette formule: sculpter une pierre en forme de pierre. (*Frag*, p.77)

On the one hand, the subject and the substrate are the same, as with a harmonic relationship. But as with the logic of the ‘vide solide’, Genet is unable to persist in this way, “sculpter une pierre en forme de pierre équivalant à se taire”. (*Ibid.*) The musical, abstract aspect is imprisoning, rather than inspiring, and Genet explains that this led his thoughts to suicide. What then of the “vocalable” avoided in favour of ‘clear reason’, but accepted in preference to actual ‘fact’? Can Genet produce meaningful play between these three levels: pure rational or mathematical relationships, then “vocalables” in which the dimension of subjectivity has been added, and then finally the empirical reality of life?

A ‘vocalable’ is a collection of sounds, possibly forming a *vocabulum* or a ‘call’, but it can also mean a patronage, as in the case, for example, of a church which would be ‘sous le vocalable d’un Saint’. The experience of reading Genet is of words “qui renvoient mal à leurs objets” (p.84), and of a narrator preoccupied with personal suffering. Genet’s hope is not to go straight to pure poetry without content, but that the rapport between each of his words should be productive of meaning. He calls this interstice of meaning between the words a “tombeau sans contenu”; and, earlier on, a “tombeau qui ne sera jamais, n’aura jamais été”. (p.84, 82) The mark is deprived of signified and referent, and yet it is more stark and violent than the *dead who had never been alive* of the *Atelier*, published two years before, while both can be seen to signify illeity belonging to an absolute past. The ambiguity is maintained as to whether it signals the flight of one we could have supposed dead, such as the empty column b on the last page of *Glas*, in which the *judas* has become the empty cave representing Easter; or whether this illeity signals, as Sartre suggests, a sadistic humour whereby Genet allows others to cower over his invented victims. (*StG*, p.610) It would be unlike Genet to give a

distinct patronage to his work, and so the address to Decimo should be examined with care for harmonic rapports. By harmonic rapport, we do not mean an accumulation in which the vibration of two ideas would simply join in the ellipsis of a blur, making two orders simultaneous, joining them at a synchronic point of contact. In Genet, literal and the figurative meanings cannot be separated definitively, and so at points of prohibitive difficulty he is very often melding different elsewheres. This is done through logical connections, dressed in often incompatible ‘vocables’, inserted into the everyday world.

These different modulations of Decimo’s character are numerous, and respond roughly to the illeity-ilyaity doubling ventured above. Genet has chosen an emissary into the world of the living, who is dying.¹²² Every step he takes brings him nearer to his grave, and yet the “pas” are separated, or imprint themselves independently of his “démarche”. (*Frag*, p.71) This description has a Heideggerian sonority, in which death, as an unpassable limit, or boundary, intensifies the ‘thereness’ of the writer. (*TaS*, p.248) However, during the entirety of this letter, Genet – who believed himself to be afflicted with consumption at the time – signals that he is writing from outside the realm of the living, fertile, heterosexual world. Death is not trusted to describe the possibilities of the subject unaided, but is instead constantly accompanied by the trace of the Other – as we have tried to show. This is true of his whole œuvre, and the layering of these traces with those of others is an intricate affair.

Genet claims that the aim of his sterile prose outside the world of communication is to produce a) the pomp of a burial, and b) its pretext, a corpse. The transience of life heaves a sigh, leaves a sign, and the name becomes a copy. Then the name and the copy disappear, leaving “une idée de misère infinie”. (*Frag*, p.82, 83) This formula, which corresponds to the infinite weakness of the other, contains a harmony and a power, of which Genet comments, “elle m’achève”: that is to say, it completes and perfects, but also finishes, “en ce qui

¹²² See Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* (1921) for a strong neo-Platonist interpretation of the identity of the fair youth in Shakespeare’s sonnets. He is sent into the world to leave a copy of himself by marrying, while the Bard records him in poetry. Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr W.H.*, (London: Hersperus, 2003).

me compose”. (p.83) The Other, both passed and past, is then seen on its way as it crosses the subject:

Ainsi parcouru de deux pieds nus qui soulèvent une poussière misérable, si ma gloire n’était pas cette poussière, cette misère, ces pieds saignants, alors quoi, quel or? (*Ibid.*)

The pomp of the ceremony of Genet’s writing is therefore sterile in the sense that it is non-utilitarian, involved in a kind of vigil, outside the communality of language understood as a “support sans cesse renaissant d’un lien entre les hommes”. (p.78) These bleeding feet seem to refer to those of the errant Oedipus or Swollen-foot, and they are not the foot of prosody.

The stone carved in the shape of a stone would depict the invisibility of this absent other, leaving only footprints or dust for the artist who depicts. Genet separates words from language, using his sculpter’s chisel:

Ils retiennent prisonnière la confuse nostalgie d’une action que des hommes accomplirent et que les mots, alors sanglants, nommeraient. (p.82)

That the tombs of these words bleed as he fashions them is confirmation that the stone that refuses to accept a likeness may, for all that, harbour a trace; a trace that is resistant to reading, or that is unpronounceable. (*AQE*, p.233, *AQEb*, p.284)

The stone shaped into a stone bespeaks a double abandonment, once by the subject that is depicted, and a second time by the artist discarding the material that will accept no likeness. This abandonment, therefore, produces not abandon, but attentiveness. The other for whom the work of art is produced has been noticed for a particular ‘trait’, perhaps in the face, that has impressed itself on the subject, before the other recedes into infinity and the subject makes its ‘re-trait’; the ‘mark’ this may leave on the contemplator may then lead to a ‘re-mark’. This is how Derrida understands the alterity Levinas seeks to describe in his oeuvre as

a whole in the late text ‘En ce moment même’ from 1980. (*ECM*, p.192) We may associate this with the Socrates character who abandons the original object, moving on to a series of considerations it provokes. To restate this process, the inanimate object carrying a scratch that may be an inscription expresses itself in relation to the *dit*, which produces a *dire* at the moment in which the flight of ‘illeity’ is detected: the *dire* of the subject noticing this flight. The subject then responds to this primary address by a series of disorderings, which settle once more into the *dit*. This double separation from the object is neatly expressed by the image in ‘Eupalinos’ of a living bunch of roses sculpted in wax, which is buried in sand and melted in fire, before receiving molten bronze. The wax stage could be the *dire* of the artist – “y imposant [s]es doigts habiles, l’œil butinant sur les corolles et revenant chargé de fleurs vers [s]on ouvrage” (*Eup*, p.115); this is an “ouvrage” which, by the time of the casting, has gone. While other flowers will resemble the work which has espoused the hollow of the absent rose, recognisable in the *dit*, none of them will be the same as the one that received the artist’s attention. Derrida calls this event, in ‘En ce moment même’, “sériature”: at once ‘series’ and ‘erasure’, in his examination of the separation and relation of the *dire* to its original object.

Let me clarify a little more Derrida’s reconstrual of the trace in ‘En ce moment même’. Levinas writes at the end of *Autrement qu’être* that the ability to ‘retie the knot’ (*AQE*, p.215, *AQEb*, p.262) of previous discourse in the said, making new saying possible, is not the mode of the State, for whom anything which does not respond to knowledge is severed; thus, “[i]l ne renoue pas les nœuds, mais les tranche.”¹²³ A new style of referring to the retreat of the Other must, therefore, be developed if this alterity is not merely to be brought within the gravitational pull of thematisation. As Levinas explains,

¹²³ This concerns the same lines or fragile threads connecting the jury to the accused in which Dmitry’s lawyer had such faith in the trial scene at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*. (*BK*, p.887, Book XII, Chapter 14)

Les interruptions du discours retrouvées et relatées dans l'immanence du dit, se conservent comme dans les nœuds d'un fil renoué [...] (*AQE*, p.216, *AQEb*, p.264; *ECM*, p.179)

Derrida then picks up on Levinas's explanation that for the interruptions not to be recuperated, they must be part of a series which is a "série hors-série". (*AQE*, p.216, *AQEb*, p.264; *ECM*, p.180) The original emission of the series is not known, and so the idea of erasure is developed by Derrida to emphasise that the retreat of the other ceases to be ontologically traceable. How then can an artwork become part of the Work generally; the work of the community of the question, which is for the Other? Can my work depart from the Same, and go out to the infinity of the Other? Derrida tells us that the work works "dans le re-trait qui remarque ce mouvement hétéronome." (*ECM*, pp.192-93) He adds that the *re-trait* is not unique even if it notices or remarks on the unique, whereas its *sériature* is unique. That is to say that the uniqueness of which the work takes note is not in a traceable *re-trait* which undersigns or retraces, but in its disconnection into a *hors série*. In this way the steps of the Other's flight are covered by *sériature* – which, unlike the signature, is unique. (*Ibid.*) The signature serves instead to mark or remark this flight, by bringing other pronouns (from its subject matter or context) visibly under its 'vocal', aegis or patronage. It is a whole congregation of signatures referring to the flights formed by traces, which form our furrows of interpretation. A certain discontinuity of approach seems to have been necessary for the writers of this study to address the *hors série*.

As we quoted above, Levinas uses the image of the State's cutting of the lines connecting it to the *Il* and the *dire*, and then an image of the retying of these knots of the absent or rejected other. This retying in an elsewhere is interestingly also described in an earlier Levinas essay, 'Énigme et phénomène' (1965), in which proximity in the face, or the 'approche' of the 'prochain', produces a cutting off from the surroundings, leaving only what would become the *dire*, "expression, visage interpellant de face, venant des profondeurs, coupant le fil du contexte". (*DHH*, p.288) We will take advantage of this apparent contradiction in

terminology in Levinas to look at Genet's treatment of the image of cutting. We already examined in Chapter One the passage in which the boy to whom Genet lends his adventures "rompt le drame" and "déchire le souvenir" that have been attributed to him. (*ND*, p.195; our Chapter I, Section 1) We now return briefly to the section of *Pompes funèbres* where Genet describes his position as a traitor amongst traitors. Here Genet speaks of both cutting and untying the strings connecting him morally to the *dire*:

À coup de hache et de cris, je coupais les cordes qui me retenaient au monde de l'habituelle morale, parfois j'en défaisais méthodiquement les nœuds. (*PF*, p.128)

While this is also an act performed by the State in the name of Justice about which it feels no qualms¹²⁴, Genet performs this act deliberately, and at complete personal loss. He cuts himself off, but can achieve no community with these others, who remain ungraspable and *hors série*. No longer connected by the threads of the *dire*, those repudiated by the State are even freer, even more able to withstand anonymity than Genet, for whom this no-man's-land offers no foothold. The Other remains unnameable and out of reach.

How then does 'Fragments' fit in with our reflection on Derrida's difficulty with the naming of the 'Il' in 'Violence et Métaphysique'? Were one to compare the wave and the rock metaphors which we have been developing, there is in each a charge of anonymity which is both propounded and vitiated: in the wave, familiar in its repetitions but carrying the unknown; and in the rock sculpted into the likeness of a rock which does not prevent it from carrying the trace. Indeed, Genet details Giacometti's wish to bury a statue so that it might be rediscovered as a geological part of the earth, as well as Sartre's report, related by Genet, that the artist would have liked the bronze itself to have risen up and shown itself without mediation. (*AT*, p.39, 47) It might also be worth calling to

¹²⁴ See *EN*, p.242.

mind again the painstaking slowness with which Giacometti sculpted, less relaying visual information than feeling his way. (p.63) There is a probable juxtaposition practiced by Genet here with some observations by Valéry in *Degas Danse Dessin*, in which Degas, at the end of his life, his failing eyesight having rendered work impossible, is also described as dominated by the tactile:

Il tâtait les objets; le sens du toucher de plus en plus dominant chez lui, il décrivaient volontiers en termes du tact; il louait un tableau en déclarant: «C'est plat comme la belle peinture», et les gestes de sa main figuraient cette planitude qui l'enchantait. De la paume et du dos de la main alternés, il passait et repassait sur un plan idéal, le lissant et le caressant comme d'une brosse douce. Un de ses vieux amis étant mort, il se fit conduire auprès du cadavre et voulut palper le visage. (DDD, p.249-52)

Genet, in the special relationship he discerns between Giacometti's art and the innumerable people of the dead, may adapt these moribund observations into a description of the beginning of a new way of working. Giacometti becomes the 'sculptor for the blind' (*AT*, p.63), whose creations communicate joy to the finger tips, remotely guiding Genet's own hands over artworks (p.9), for whom now a copied Donatello is dead to the touch (p.63). It is as though something communicated into the texture of the material itself were speaking instead of resemblance; as though the trace was able to animate the *dire* from a far finer state of disappearance than previously thought. It is also interesting to note the way the sense of sight, which commonly associates understanding with light¹²⁵, is translated into the other senses, especially the sense of touch, which, rather than acquiring, instead, undergoes.

As Llewelyn argues, things may be implied in the drama of responsibility played out in between being and the beyond being: "hypo-Critical responsibility [...] may welcome as its recipients everything in space and time, including things

¹²⁵ "[Q]u'elle émane du soleil sensible ou du soleil intelligible, la lumière, depuis Platon, conditionne tout être." (*DEE*, p.74)

that, in his account of my welcoming the other into my home, get what ethical relevance they have only by being *donanda*, that is to say as food, drink, clothing and suchlike, as things to be given to my guest.” (*HI*, pp.218-19) He then adds with an oblique reference to the *es gibt*, the givenness of being in Heidegger, that without a human donor or recipient these objects may also be “given back to themselves”. Rather than referring to animate beings as such, they may already be considered as *étants*, and that it should, therefore, not be necessary “to see them as somehow belonging to the other human being.” (*Ibid.*) These objects may be regarded as faces in their unassailable individuality, and stake a claim to our sensibility.

In ‘Éthique et esprit’ from *Difficile Liberté*, Levinas comments on the will of art to give a face to things, something which he argues it cannot achieve, but which nevertheless constitutes “sa grandeur et son mensonge”. (*DL*, p.21) For ethics to be derived not from external laws but from response in the anarchic encounter, the other needs to be capable of some kind of address or language. There are, however, imaginative reconstructions which Levinas offers for the reworking of his ideas. Llewelyn points out such a chiasmus in *De l’oblitération*, in which art is described as offering a face. Levinas denies that this could help to rehabilitate the artwork, since it has committed no offence, responding merely to its own ontological character. The danger, instead, is that by offering a face it may impose the silence of its beauty. (*OBL*, p.8) He does, however, speak about Gogol’s Akaki Akakievitch in terms of his overcoat, though not as a surpassing of form in the face, but as an expulsion from form. The coat cannot protect its owner from the world, and leaves him exposed and prone. Levinas gives an account of another expulsion from form in ‘Nom d’un chien’, also from *Difficile Liberté*, in which Jewish prisoners of war were evicted from their humanity by the gaze of their captors, which saw in them only the simian. Interestingly, in the same way that the overcoat demonstrated the obliteration of the face, the obliteration of the comparison with apes is countered by another animal: a dog that recognises ethical commandment in the Jewish prisoners, rescuing them from the simian, and

restoring them to the human. (*DL*, p.216)¹²⁶ The question is not as to whether a dog has a face or just a muzzle, but its role as a marker of the solitude and separation of the faces to which it is sensitive.

We see therefore that the glimpsing of the Other to which Levinas seeks to sensitise his readers may find different moments of aesthetic expression. Such instances may involve the non-human and inanimate as well as the human. In each case, however, the beyond being is intimated through being in the discontinuity caused by the passing of the other. The withdrawal of the contemplating subject is thus related to the uniqueness of the Other, and may be a moment of possible ethical crisis, in hypoCrisis, just as it may be a moment of possible hypocrisy, if its representation is allowed to take precedence over its alterity. In the next section we will look at the artist's and contemplator's manner of marking and remarking this process in order to compare the work of the subject, the work of the artist and the ethical Work performed on behalf of the Other.

3. The face in art

As Derrida shows in 'Violence et Métaphysique' Levinas's treatment of absolute alterity is a risky affair, as it may inadvertently ontologise the transcendence to which it is attracted. However, this risk, emphasised in our discussion, is accompanied by a stylistic strategy in Levinas, which works by doubling its descriptions in such a way that a positive and negative inflection of transcendence is discerned. This is a complex affair in philosophy and art, especially when an everyday vocabulary is endowed with special meanings.

¹²⁶ At a recent conference Alphonso Lingis pointed out that the face in nature is vulnerable, even down to a smouldering cigarette butt in dry grass. (Vilnius, *On the Ruins of Totality*, April 2006) Glimpsing recent footage of an ancient species of shark rejected by the depths, lost on the surface, it is easy to feel that it belongs to an immemorial past and also behaves like the trace. It is also worth drawing the parallel between the exotically named dog Bobby, which Levinas describes, and the companionship of the dog mentioned in *The House of the Dead* by Dostoevsky, called Sharik. (*HofD*, pp.125-26)

The ‘face’ is one important such example, since it is that which at once shows itself, and hides an interiority. An extra layer of difficulty is added when we consider representations of the face, which as we concluded in the previous section can be studies in alterity, and yet being reproductions, are not alterity itself, and may even risk replacing the call of the face with the prestige of the beautiful. This then engages the Derridian description of the *re-trait* and the *re-marque* of the artist struck by an alterity, who reproduces something of this otherness for us. The *re-trait* notices the unique, but is not unique itself as it melds the other with its interior life, but as Derrida has told us “sa sériature est unique”, which is to say that by being marked, its entry into discontinuity with the remarking subject and meaning in general can retain its unique character. (*ECM*, p.193) It is therefore possible for the face to retain its alterity, not precisely in the depiction itself, but in the erasure or ‘rature’ parallel to the Said of discourse.

Let us look more closely at the commentaries on the face that may be garnered in some of our shared source texts and see how they may have been later used by Genet and Levinas in their treatment of these problems of alterity. If we go back to Dostoevsky for a moment, in *The Adolescent* there is a highly evocative scene in which Arkady notices the unusually good likeness of a photograph of his mother in his father’s study. This is explained to him by Versilov:

An artist studies a face and divines its main thought, though at the moment of painting it might be absent from the face. A photograph finds the man as he is [...] (*AD*, p.458)

As Genet explains in the *Atelier*, the way of approaching a work of art is different to that used for the living face, or a natural phenomenon:

Je crois qu’il importe de l’isoler. Si mon regard le fait échapper à tout ce qui l’entoure, si mon regard (mon attention) empêche que ce visage se

confonde avec le reste du monde, et qu'il s'évade à l'infini en significations de plus en plus vagues, hors de lui-même, et si, au contraire, cette solitude est obtenue, par laquelle mon regard le coupe du monde, c'est sa seule signification qui va affluer et s'entasser dans ce visage, – ou cette personne, ou cet être, ou ce phénomène. – Je veux dire que la connaissance d'un visage si elle veut être esthétique doit refuser d'être historique.

Pour examiner un tableau un effort plus grand, une opération plus complexe sont nécessaires. *C'est en effet le peintre – ou le sculpteur – qui ont effectué pour nous l'opération décrite plus haut.* C'est donc la solitude de la personne ou de l'objet représentés qui nous est restituée, et nous, qui regardons, pour la percevoir et être touchés par elle devons avoir une expérience de l'espace non de sa continuité mais discontinuité. (*AT*, pp.18-19, my emphasis)

The divining and recording of the idea, therefore, involves a discontinuity in both time and space, which serves to isolate the object from the distortion of other meanings. For Genet there are two possible layers of difficulty lying between the living face and the artwork. “Un visage vivant ne se livre déjà pas si facilement”; and yet, in a mode of communication, it is usually possible to divine the meaning of a face, or at least to attribute a workable meaning to it, without letting it escape into the vagaries of the environment. The artwork, on the other hand, as we read in the quotation from *The Adolescent*, has already received the mediation of the artist, cutting the face from its environment, guessing its main idea, and feasibly adding ideas and associations of its own from elsewhere. The art object and the original model are each able, for Genet, to create Valéry's “temps infini”, quoted above. (*Eup*, p.161) Levinas has already declared that the arm and the nape belong to the face (*EN*, p 244), which implies that the separation of the original face must be implicated in its reproduction, or in the reproduction of an accoutrement being or phenomenon, themselves isolated from the utilitarian world, as long as they do not eclipse the alterity to which they refer. This means there are two objects in

play, concurring with Levinas's anxiety over representation, which Genet expresses in the following way: "C'est donc à la fois cette image qui est sur la toile – et l'objet réel qu'elle représente que je veux saisir dans leur solitude." (*AT*, p.19) For the object to be attached to one's own experience of space is not the same as for the object to offer itself to the grasp as a thing, which would, as Levinas fears, deprive it of the alterity expressed in the face. (*DL*, p.20) The work of separating an object from its context is considered, by Genet, in its proper difficulty; as an isolation which he considers as occupying a facial dimension of identity or alterity in uniqueness. We take the famous example of the handkerchief:

Un jour, dans ma chambre, je regardais une serviette posée sur une chaise, alors j'ai vraiment eu l'impression que, non seulement chaque objet était seul, mais qu'il avait un poids – ou une absence de poids plutôt – qui empêchait de peser sur l'autre. La serviette était seule, tellement seule que j'avais l'impression de pouvoir enlever la chaise sans que la serviette change de place. Elle avait sa propre place, son propre poids, et jusqu'à son propre silence... (*AT*, pp.39-40)¹²⁷

So how does Genet move on from this uniqueness of the object in order for this to illuminate the uniqueness of the miserable old man studied in Chapter One? Is there an isolatable instance of the *Il*, independent of the unique object, and the *tu*?

We have already alluded to the fact that for Genet, Giacometti does not create for the future generations of the living for the benefit of "générations enfants", but so that his work should reunite with "l'immémoriale nuit peuplée de morts qui vont se reconnaître dans cette œuvre." (*AT*, p.8) The immemorial

¹²⁷ Valéry describes the difficulty of drawing the "informe", especially of the everyday object for which there is no convention. He takes the example of a crumpled handkerchief and the uncommon amount of attention it requires to draw. "Je jette sur une table un mouchoir que j'ai froissé. Cet objet ne ressemble à rien. Il est d'abord pour l'œil un désordre de plis. [...] C'est ici que l'artiste peut exercer son intelligence, et que l'œil doit trouver, par ses mouvements sur ce qu'il voit, les chemins du crayon sur le papier, comme un aveugle doit, en la palpant, accumuler les éléments de contact d'une forme, et acquérir point par point la connaissance et l'unité d'un solide très régulier." (*DDD*, p.103)

quality of death refers to *illeity* without the ontologising familiarity of the *tu*. The idea of the Unknown Soldier enables us to imagine the single plurality of the *vous*, which would be required, but here the artwork is not a monument in which the absence of the dead is in some way offered to the living and the people of the future. Let us read the following quotation in full:

Non, non, l'œuvre d'art n'est pas destinée aux générations enfants. Elle est offerte à l'innombrable peuple des morts. Qui l'agrément. Ou la refusent. Mais ces morts dont je parlais n'ont jamais été vivants. Ou je l'oublie. Ils le furent assez pour qu'on l'oublie, et que leur vie avait pour fonction de les faire passer ce tranquille rivage où ils attendent un signe – venu d'ici – et qu'ils reconnaissent. (*Ibid.*)

This opens a number of possible chiasmic readings between Levinas and Genet. As the *Il* is absent, the dead to which the artwork is offered up are paradoxically described as never having been alive. So is this immemorial time, or is it an aesthetic time in which one may doubt that the dead have even passed or indeed ever been? But next their never having been alive is put into doubt, “[o]u je l'oublie”, he admits. That is to say he may have forgotten about them, and that he himself is obscurely at fault. He goes on with a seemingly simple repetition, which then deepens: ‘They were alive enough for us to forget them, and for their life to have had as a purpose that they should depart from this tranquil shore’. This means that perhaps the only useful act they performed was to depart, but from this position of departure – shared by Sonia, Rashkalknikov, Leïla, Saïd, the occupants of *Le Bagne*, the homosexual writer in ‘Fragments’, and Genet in *Pompes funèbres* – there is the possibility that, although gone over there, to the other shore, there ‘they await a sign – come from here – one they will recognize.’ They are waiting for a response, and the sign they are waiting for is not a matter of the aesthetic effects put there by the artist (*DEE*, p.85), but a supplementary sign on the part of the consumer of the art object. If the sign the dead will recognise comes from our shore, it is to be released from our environment, in which they

have been forgotten, perhaps deliberately. In the opening to the *Atelier*, Genet describes a world which, by our own action, we could never make “absolument autre”. (*AT*, p.2) But here, already, tension between the tenses begins to appear, as nostalgia for a past that could have been different meets the future of the contemplator:

On songe avec nostalgie à un univers où l’homme, au lieu d’agir aussi furieusement sur l’apparence visible, se serait employé à s’en défaire, non seulement à refuser toute action sur elle, mais à se dénuder assez pour découvrir ce lieu secret, en nous-même, à partir de quoi eût été possible une aventure humaine toute différente. (*Ibid.*)

The “eut été” of this passage carries more of a charge of pastness than the English pluperfect, as it is the past historic, closing the event into a past unconnected to the present. However, the nostalgia – for a future – remains intact:

Mais, après tout, c’est peut-être à cette inhumaine condition, à cet inéluctable agencement, que nous devons la nostalgie d’une civilisation qui tâcherait de s’aventurer ailleurs que dans le mesurable. [...] Mais à Giacometti aussi peut-être fallait-il cette inhumaine condition qui nous est imposée, pour que sa nostalgie en devienne si grande qu’elle lui donnerait la force de réussir dans sa recherche. (pp.2-3)

So it is a pressure of nostalgia which is capable of moving the subject and which forms part of this sign for which the people of the dead are still waiting.

This seems not to be a Heideggerian description of being as *Mitandersein* (being with one another), which supposes a collectivity united around something held in common (*DEE*, p.162), since Genet describes an ‘inhuman condition’ (my emphasis) comparable in its impersonality to the *il y a*. Neither does it follow Heideggerian being-towards-death, which produces care through the threat of all ties to the world being dissolved. (p.13) The wish to venture ‘elsewhere than into

the measurable' does not butt against the immeasurable and respond through a renewed effort to 'be-with' during life; it is instead a situation in which the solitary self is visited by the nostalgia of the immeasurable which gives it the strength to "réussir dans sa recherche". In Giacometti's case this search or quest is for the unique. It brings to mind the descriptions of melancholy in Levinas's essay 'Sur la mort chez Ernst Bloch', in which the relationship of the subject to history and death is recalibrated, and the *memento mori* is turned towards the other. (*DVI*, pp.72-73)¹²⁸ The intensification of the suffering of nostalgia for something outside the 'inhuman condition' (*AT*, p.3, my emphasis), to quote Genet again, provides instead an impetus towards a not yet present condition. As Levinas writes, the melancholy of partial failure "c'est la façon dont l'homme s'accorde à son devenir historique, c'est sa façon de se tenir dans l'être inachevé." (*DVI*, p.72) But in the light of Bloch's work, he does not exclude the utopia of a possible completed work, by which "l'obscurité du sujet est traversée d'un rayon venant, comme de l'avenir utopique." (p.73) This may be the same ray of light we already referred to in Chapter One, the ray coming from the eye of the young man in the train after his transfiguration in 'Rembrandt déchiré', which turned senescence into juvenescence. This is not a derivative light, but one that crosses us from a future, and may be released by the experience of melancholy or nostalgia from within totality.¹²⁹ It belongs to part of what Levinas calls on the one hand the *already* – the pluperfect insertion of an idea – and on the other the *not yet*, a future possibility seen through a responsibility, one that is recognisable to the individual, who is aware of this structure that is neither merely being, nor merely non-being, but rather *not yet*.

The relation to the Other of the subject is bound up with an experience of time from a position of separation. The discontinuity of this position is for Genet the source of all beauty, whether it be for the individual or the inanimate:

¹²⁸ We also quote from *Totalité et infini*, "La mort, source de tout les mythes, n'est présente qu'en autrui." (*Tel*, p.154, *Telb*, p.195)

¹²⁹ This light image seems already to be present in Levinas's middle period, and can also be found described as a reflection in *Totalité et infini*, "Cet «au-delà» de la totalité et de l'expérience objective, ne se décrit pas cependant d'une façon purement négative. Il se reflète à l'intérieur de la totalité et de l'histoire, à l'intérieur de l'expérience." (*Tel*, XI, *Telb*, p.7)

Il n'est pas pour la beauté d'autre origine que la blessure, singulière, différente pour chacun, cachée ou visible, que tout homme garde en soi, qu'il préserve et où il se retire quand il veut quitter le monde pour une solitude temporaire mais profonde. Il y a donc loin de cet art à ce qu'on nomme misérabilisme. L'art de Giacometti me semble vouloir découvrir cette blessure secrète de tout être et même toute chose, afin qu'elle les illumine. (*AT*, pp.3-4)

Our claim is that the relationship between the 'already' and the 'not yet' in Levinas is in this instance what the wound in Genet flickeringly illuminates. There are several questions here: of generation, gender, of abiding within the self; but all of them grouped somehow in questions of the face. The face has a beyond, and therefore a kind of fecundity, a 'not yet' of its offspring in the Third, that is the absent others to whom I am also responsible. We should therefore take this opportunity to note with Llewelyn that, in a non-biological sense, a same sex relationship can be understood as heterosexual. (*GE*, p.87) The offspring engendered through responsibility are conceived through the Other, which are in some way 'already' resident in the home, as the Other's need for an abode is felt in the foreboding of the *il y a*, as Llewelyn puts it. (p.127) This has the advantage over Heideggerian *theo-ria*, which attempts to *give us to see* the gift of being, because in the 'not yet' there is a phenomenology of what is as yet absent. In the case of Genet's theory of the wound, and Levinas's theory of the face, their enigma refers to a secret region, and therefore does not *give* itself to be seen, even though for Genet the wound is the place from where "tout leur être afflue." (*AT*, p.31) This flux or welling up is not, however, tappable at source; for the centre of interest in the frontal view of a portrait is derived differently, "tout doit partir de ce centre pour aller nourrir, fortifier ce qui est derrière, caché. [...] [L]e peintre tire en arrière (derrière la toile) la signification du visage." (p.61) In a similar way, one can understand the theoretical gesture of the face in Levinas as non-theoretical, for it does not surrender itself. Rather than seeing being, the act of

seeing itself becomes a term implying temporal generation, for it is the generations to come which generate time. But has not Genet explicitly told us that Giacometti's art is not meant or destined "aux générations enfants" (p.8), but instead for the innumerable people of the dead? This apparent impasse may usefully be compared to Valéry's poem 'La jeune Parque', in which the female narrator is drawn out of her entombment into an, at first, impersonal, then individual, personal fecundity. As Levinas writes in *Totalité et infini*:

Il s'agit d'un néant distinct du néant de l'angoisse, du néant de l'avenir enseveli dans le secret du moins que rien. (*Tel*, p.244, *Telb*, p.299)

To be sepultured in the less than nothing of the 'not yet' is to cross dead time. This time is traversed very differently in Genet and Levinas, though with an ethical crossing point which we shall seek to discern. In Levinas this being and non-being is thought in terms of fecundity, illustrated through the parent, whereby "le moi est dans l'enfant, un autre". (*Ibid.*) In Genet, on the other hand, at this juncture, the continuity of time is thought in relation to the alternating directions of the people of the dead, come to greet the viewer of a statue and to pass him by, or recede once again. The ego is therefore implicated in the exemplar of the people of the dead, producing, as does fil(ial)ity in Levinas, an identification through the self, which is at the same time a form of differentiation. And so it is with Giacometti's relationships to his own statues. Genet observes to the artist, "c'est peut-être que, malgré tout, la femme vous paraît naturellement plus lointaine... ou bien vous voulez la faire reculer...". (*AT*, p.22) Giacometti's unstraightforward relations with women are addressed later in the *Atelier*, though Genet follows up this hesitant observation by situating himself in relation to women. He does this not sexually but filially in relation to, one suspects, one woman, "Malgré moi, sans rien lui en dire, j'évoque l'image de la Mère, si haut placée, ou que sais-je?" (*Ibid.*) Is not Genet referring tangentially, not to the 'highly placed' or "highly favoured" (*Luke* 1.28) Mother of the Virgin Mary, but to his own progenitor, known only by the name Camille Gabriel Genet? So while

evocations of fil(l)iation in flesh and blood are relatively rare in Genet's writing before the theatrical works and before *Un captif amoureux*, there is already present an ethical concern for the position of the Other in the continuity or discontinuity of time. Since these two moments of speculation on the feminine on behalf of Giacometti and himself bespeak distance or separation, we find ourselves in the impenetrable territory of love and death. It is possible to understand Genet's use of death and the people of the dead to denote at once the defunct and those who have for whatever reason departed; that is been excluded, as with Leïla and Saïd, or abandoned, as we can surmise was Genet's own mother when she abandoned him as a child.

Strongly throughout the oeuvre, though especially in the *Atelier*, *Le Bagne*, 'Fragments' and *Les Paravents*, a trace of the region of death seems to have all but replaced fecundity. But equally in Levinas, biology is only a synecdoche of future generations, which rather than being thought only in the mode of succession should also be thought as 'precession', the exercise of a torque through gravitational influence between separate bodies affecting the initial body's orbit. By this we mean to describe the clinamen operated by the Other, whether near or far, and understood in terms of both space and time. As Genet writes, "L'injustice – et notre douleur – seraient trop grandes si une seule d'entre elle [la mort] était privée de la connaissance d'un seul d'entre nous, et notre victoire bien pauvre si elle ne nous faisait gagner qu'une gloire future." (*AT*, pp.15-18) This communication with the dead, whereby we appear before them ("comparaître"), rather than they before us, is related to a fault line in the structure of the subject, in its relationship to time and in its need for forgiveness. This is no desire for forgiveness before finite time runs out; forgiveness is sought instead in relation to the incompleteness of time, stretching across dead time between both the immemorial ancestor and future generations.

In Genet, a rethreading of the *il y a* of dead time takes place in receptiveness to the immemorial ancestor.¹³⁰ The subject's crossing of this dead

¹³⁰ See Golding's *The Inheritors* for a study on modern man's relationship to an immemorial ancestor. William Golding, *The Inheritors* (London: Faber, 1955).

time is further complicated in that it is also answerable before the Third; that is, not before a particular other, nor merely before the general alterity of *Autrui*, but before a ‘people of the dead’, comprised of interrelated individuals, in which the relation to one alters the configuration of all the others. This is something Genet describes in the progress of Giacometti’s sculpting. During the creation of one statue, the finished statues alter and change, “parce qu’il travaille à l’une de leurs sœurs.” (*GOC5*, p.72)¹³¹ While Genet is indifferent to the charms of nude female models, he sees the statues themselves in the way Giacometti sees the models, *as* goddesses, not *like* goddesses: that is not in a comparison with, but in their capacity as. Turning our attention to the power with which the statues are endowed, we will examine them as related both to the erotic dominion of the idol and to the ethical commandment of alterity:

C’est l’œuvre de Giacometti qui me rend notre univers encore plus insupportable, tant il semble que cet artiste a su écarter ce qui gênait son regard pour découvrir ce qui restera de l’homme quand les faux-semblants seront enlevés. (*AT*, p.3)

What seems to have been left behind is the wound born in solitude on behalf of all beings and things. Genet has just commented that Giacometti transforms his experience of women as goddesses into the statues, giving pure percept, dissolving utilitarian bonds. (p.45) However, Genet’s descriptions of Giacometti’s experience of prostitutes complicate this pure artistic position, borne out of respect for alterity. We quote Genet’s rendition of the importance of brothels to Giacometti:

Il me semble qu’il y entrait presque en adorateur. Il y venait pour s’y voir à genoux en face d’une divinité implacable et lointaine. Entre chaque putain nue et lui, il y avait peut-être cette distance, que ne cesse d’établir chacune

¹³¹ This passage is missing from the Barbezat edition we have been abbreviating as *AT*.

de ses statues entre elles et nous. Chaque statue semble reculer – ou en venir – dans une nuit à ce point lointaine et épaisse qu'elle se confond avec la mort: ainsi chaque putain devrait-elle rejoindre une nuit mystérieuse où elle était souveraine. Et lui, abandonné sur un rivage d'où il la voit à la fois rapetisser et grandir dans un même moment. (p.52)

This ambiguous description would seem to represent a collapse in this text of the Levinasian vocabulary used to separate the saintly (in the uniqueness of separation), from the idolatrous (in the sacrifices made to the idol). It is as though the artist, absorbed in the uniqueness of his model, in her illeity, imposes upon himself in response an elemental experience in the brothel in the *apeiron* of the *il y a*, in which the erotic embrace has been stripped of all concern for the other's uniqueness or fragility, and plunged into an impersonal, intemporal realm.¹³² So what are we to make of Giacometti's view of the Other's inviolable singularity? Are not these prostitutes by design violable? Returning to the movement between shores, it is the prostitute who slips away in the flight described above, abandoning Giacometti, while the distance between himself and the whore is given as a parallel, by Genet, for the relationship between the statue and the spectator. In common with the other descriptions, the 'she' of the prostitute, like that of the statue, returns to death, while 'he', the artist, persists in life. His, then, is strangely an experience of *her* illeity, in a *hors série* outside of any generative succession.¹³³ Yet while the depth and beauty of the feminine face in the "moins

¹³² Nietzsche seems to examine this movement from individuation to impersonal being in his Dionysian-Apollonian separation, which also seems to be, as for Giacometti, sexual in nature: "the phenomenon that pain begets joy, that ecstasy may wring sounds of agony from us. At the very climax of joy there sounds a cry of horror or a yearning lamentation for an irretrievable loss." (*BoFT*, Chapter 2, p.40) While one hopes that "horror" is not a general description for all sexual encounters, the scenario in the *Atelier* of an exploitative conjunction followed by abandonment does go far beyond the idea contained in the Latin saying *Post Coitum Omne Animal Triste Est*, which would suggest mere melancholy, in that a failed meeting is not automatically a "loss". The impersonal quality of the Nietzsche and Genet descriptions, we emphasise once again comes from a relation to being. Following the irretrievable loss quotation, we are also given an idea of the *apeiron* through something like the wave metaphor, expressing both suspension and participation in being, through music, in "the wave beat of rhythm". (*Ibid.*)

¹³³ The gender dissonance present in "her illeity" will be explored in more detail in a paper planned on Derrida's 'En ce moment même'.

que rien” risks being replaced by the image, as Levinas writes (*TeI*, pp.240-41, *TeIb*, p.294), these images, Giacometti’s images of women and Genet’s images of prostitutes, may still serve to elicit a responsive Saying.

This concurs in some way with Levinas’s views on art, for Giacometti does not correct the squint in nature, as would the classical artist. (*RO*, p.118) The suspended present he produces is therefore not the comfortable one of self-satisfied harmony, though neither is it a form of miserabilism. (*AT*, p.3) If the artist is able to notice the wound of every being and every thing, then that which renders the inhuman condition (as a thing amongst things) more intolerable is also that which renders individual solitude more difficult to bear. This is the way we read the ‘nevermore’ of the delivery from solitude:

n’est-ce pas au bordel que la femme pourrait s’enorgueillir d’une blessure qui ne délivrera jamais plus de la solitude, et n’est-ce pas le bordel qui la débarrassera de toute attribution utilitaire, lui faisant ainsi gagner une sorte de pureté. (p.53)

This dubious and paradoxical statement understands the lack of technical utility as non-utilitarian, which one might first of all understand as the quality of being attractive rather than practical. But the use to which the prostitute is put is not directly problematised in this quotation. A similar observation appears in *Le Balcon*: “La vie est à côté... et elle est très loin. Ici toutes les femmes sont belles... Elles ne servent à rien d’autre qu’à être belles.” (*GOC4*, p.131) In fact, in a sense, they are utilitarian, because being beautiful is the purpose that they serve. This logic can be extended to argue that prostitutes are also technical, in terms of being proficient, as Madame Lysiane argues when she describes her girls as ministering to the sick. (*QU*, pp.300-301) But for Roger, the chief revolutionary who pronounces the above *Balcon* speech, such beauty is incompatible with useful political engagement, and the revolutionary cause is lost. Artistic truth and political engagement are, therefore, quite different. Levinas argues the same point in ‘La Réalité et son ombre’, in a thinly veiled criticism of Sartre’s *Qu’est-ce que*

la littérature? (1948), saying that participation in an art object concerned with engagement is still a participation in a piece of art, itself within being, rather than the disordering of being in the world by the other beyond it. Genet is also increasingly critical of Sartre's position and adopts the stance that art should not be social, and therefore neither directly political nor engaged. Giacometti's art instead is one of separation and solitude:

L'art de Giacometti n'est donc pas un art social parce qu'il établirait entre les objets un lien social – l'homme et ses sécrétions – il serait plutôt un art de clochards supérieurs, à ce point purs que ce qui pourrait les unir serait une reconnaissance de la solitude de tout être et de tout objet. (*AT*, pp.72-73)

Political engagement would, it seems, short-circuit this new mode of solitude, which, as we shall see, is the premise for an ethics of alterity.

For Genet, the source of beauty in the art object, like the imperfection in the structure of the self, can be described as a secret wound. However, both can be obscured by *faux-semblant*, that is by the illusions that conceal what Genet describes as “une aventure humaine toute différente. Plus précisément morale sans doute.” (p.2) If, as we quoted above, Giacometti “a su écarter ce qui gênait son regard” (p.3), then the magnificent image he gives to us is of something in its solitude. However, the brothel has played too large a part in Giacometti's life for Genet to ignore it, while in his own oeuvre the brothel as house of illusion and metaphor for the world also plays a conspicuous role. And yet, another contradiction exists: if Giacometti is able to remove the “faux-semblant” (p.3), then can he do this in the heart of illusion itself, to which he himself is intermittently subjugated, both in the French understanding of enamoured, and in the more etymological idea of accepting a “joug”? Is the brothel, as a response to alterity, more a form of compulsive resistance to this same alterity, whereby the solitude which the artist sets out in quest of in the first place is denied, in which

the non-utility of the artwork enters into conflict with the use to which someone is put who is excluded from the artist's preferred subjects?

Genet poses an uncomfortable question by taking the wound of solitude, the origin of all beauty, and making it the source of beauty and pride for someone who cannot choose her company, and whose solitude can only be an interior one of separation. Is this account of exploited beauty therefore not meant to intensify the dissatisfaction at the "faux semblant" against which Giacometti's art, at least according to Genet, would seem to work? The secrecy of the wound may be so hidden that the subject him or herself is unaware of it. And yet, some of its visible manifestations are also welcomed as expressive of something intimate to the subject:

Il [Giacometti] reprend sa marche en boitant. Il me dit qu'il a été très heureux quand il a su que son opération – après un accident – le laisserait boiteux. Voilà pourquoi je vais hasarder ceci: ses statues me donnent encore l'impression qu'elles se réfugient, en dernier lieu, dans je ne sais quelle infirmité secrète qui leur accorde la solitude. (p.33)

But would this not also mean being called out of solitude by the solitude of the other's wound, which I am able remotely to sense as the hidden source of their beauty? Does this not mean that by rendering the wound in some way visible in art, the solicitation made to the subject by the secret wound noticed in the other is rendered urgent? Let us examine some other literary examples.

Rashkalkov was engaged, shortly after his arrival in Petersburg, to his landlady's sickly daughter. (*CP*, p.120, Part II, Chapter 1.) He recalls this later, after the doctor's visit, in the company of his family, "[...] Such – such a plain girl. I really don't know why I was so attached to her at the time. Because she was always ill, I suppose. If she'd been lame or a hunchback I believe I'd have loved her better still.' He smiled wistfully." (p.248, Part III, Chapter 3). This bears comparison with Giacometti's amorous adventures with an old tramp woman. Genet even asks why he didn't marry her, and present her to the world as his wife.

(*AT*, p.66) For Rashkalnikov as well as Giacometti, the visible manifestations of the wound of the other produce attachment across separation. This phenomenon is reproduced in various elements of Genet's work: in Stilitano's severed hand (*JV*, p.68), Querelle's squint (*QU*, p.405; *Glas*, 131b), and again in Genet's limp (*CA*, p.289), and the one-legged prisoner met by Culafroy in *Notre-Dame* (*ND*, p.130).¹³⁴

This strange anti-Darwinian impulse we call compassion seems to be a general feature of all these texts. Compassion creates a connection to the other which is not mere sympathy and certainly not an empathy that would claim to know how the other felt. It is instead a feeling for the separateness of the other in their affliction. This is only one step away from the secrecy of a shared solitude touched upon in Chapter One, which forms the basis of a proto-ethics. As Genet writes in a key passage towards the end of the *Atelier*, "Étant ce que je suis, et sans réserve, ma solitude connaît la vôtre." (*AT*, p.73) Let us examine this remark in the context of a further reflection on prostitutes. Genet writes:

Je ne crois pas – je me trompe peut-être – qu'il en ait peinte une seule. S'il devait le faire, il se trouverait donc en face d'un être avec sa solitude à laquelle s'en ajoute une autre qui relève du désespoir, ou de la vacuité.
(p.67)

Although the use of prostitutes as models was a common pre-war practice, Genet claims Giacometti did not paint a single one, as this would have supplemented the solitude of the prostitute with the solitude and despair of the artist.¹³⁵ There seems to exist in the prostitute, for Giacometti, a pornography of the other's solitude from which the prostitute cannot escape. This would surely have to be dissociated from the solitude of the beings, phenomena and things in which or in whom he seeks, in Genet's view, to discover the secret wound. This is because in

¹³⁴ In *The Brothers*, Maximov's first wife is also lame. (*BK*, p.496)

¹³⁵ Interview June 2005 with Simon Bolin, wife of the painter Gustav Bolin, who held a neighbouring studio to Giacometti's in the rue du Moulin Vert from immediately post-war until Bolin's own death in 2000.

pornography, the grapheme of the other's uniqueness is represented and therefore accorded neither separation nor the status of trace through which a community of separation might be possible. It would be a *retrait* become reproducible and come loose from its commandment, rather than a *sériature*, to return to our above argument. Were Giacometti required to study the prostitute – who is transformed in his eyes from a “poule” into a “déesse” (p.11) – in the same way he studied other objects in their uniqueness, then his reneging on a precontractual responsibility could indeed create the situation of despair or ‘vacuité’ which Genet mentions. We are tempted to translate this ‘vacuité’ as ‘dereliction’, in which time would cease to flow, become substance and discover, once again, the “vide solide”, in which the separated subject has become, for Lévinas, “moi-substance”. (EN, pp.220-21) It is as though, at a certain point, attractiveness became practical or useful for the achievement of pleasure; or, as Genet writes in *Un captif amoureux* at the end of the description of the palace and the shantytown: “En pourrissant chacun se sentait soulagé, donc apaisé, d’échapper à l’effort moral et esthétique, les bordels ne voyaient avancer vers eux qu’une reptation de désirs à calmer vite. Ce qui va au bordel s’y traîne à mille pattes, le ventre dans la glaise, cherchant et trouvant le trou qui palpite et mouille, où en cinq secondes par cinq secousses disparaît l’énervement de la semaine.” (CA, p.87)

The fact that this description of the brothel was begun in the *Atelier* suggests that the escape from moral and aesthetic effort in the brothel would not only turn something non-utilitarian into something practical, but that this could become a practice in its own right. The brothels then become a parallel to Giacometti's artistic practice and even an uneasy sacralized alternative. All of this is recorded by Genet in an effort to interrupt any easy equation between Giacometti's subjects, his output and any pretence to *bonté*. Indeed, if Genet argues that the meaning of art comes from separation, which is disengaged, he presents in the same gesture the concomitant danger that art could provide an alternative to resistance in the face of injustice. Genet identifies a pressing cultural danger that the plight of the other may be enjoyed aesthetically, but not be intervened in practically.

The risk of this is what might be called an abortive transcendence, in which compassion towards the other fails to leave the self, in less the society of two of the erotic relationship than a society of one. Alphonso Lingis describes the complementary phenomena of acrotmetophilia, the love for an amputee, and apotemnophilia, the love “in which sexueroetic arousal and facilitation or attainment of orgasm are responsive to and contingent on the fantasy of being lame, with a limp or crippled.”¹³⁶ Very often the former group, who are attracted to disability (“devotees”), are also members of the latter group who want to be disabled (“wanabees”). While we are not suggesting that Rashkalknikov and Giacometti are sufferers of these complex psychological conditions, they do fit a certain pattern of the “pornography of the good” (*GE*, p.125), in which the separation from the person to whom one is responsible becomes the requirement that this person be maintained in their enfeebled state, to a point where the beloved’s participation may even be substituted by the care giver’s own imitation of them. This would remove the need for emotional or practical resources to leave the economy of the self, allowing them to be savoured in the ego or the same.

It is also possible, however, in sincere and self-sacrificing love of the other, to make of the weak an idol. We shall take another example from *The Brothers Karamazov*, from Book IV, Chapters 5 and 6, which are set in Mme Kokhlov’s drawing room and Snegiryov’s cottage. An essential term forms part of the titles of these two chapters, the Russian, ‘nadriv’, coming from the verb ‘rvat’ meaning, “to tear.” In the better French translations, including the one by Nietochka Niezvanov in the Pléiade edition, we read “déchirement”¹³⁷, while, in English, McDuff offers us “strain”, and Pevear, the perhaps slightly too literal “crack up”; Garnett suggests “lacerations”, and Avsey the very safe “crisis”. While this is a fiendishly difficult term to translate, having been largely coined by Dostoevsky, what the modern day Russian expression “to speak with ‘nadriv’” denotes is to be emotionally implicated, or under pressure to the point of being rent between

¹³⁶ Alphonso Lingis, *Body Transformations* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.77-78.

¹³⁷ The translations of the term ‘nadriv’ may be found on the contents pages of the different translations; we refer the reader to the bibliography for full references.

alternatives. The insulted Snegiryov cannot accept help from Alyosha and so delays the treatment of his son, Illyusha, who is gravely ill. Katerina convinces herself she loves Dmitry, because he may submit his will to her own, whereas Ivan never could. It could be further argued that she is only willing to sacrifice herself to Dmitry if Ivan's ardour will lead to a kind of parallel sacrifice to her own. This intuited eventuality leads Ivan to give his blessing to her devotion for Dmitry (which is also spurred by Katerina's rivalry with Grushenka), and leave.

Irina Levotina describes a key element of this concept in her article 'Dostoevskian Nadriv'. She describes the term as "masochistic self-admiration", also stressing the unnatural character of these manifestations.¹³⁸ Dostoevsky, by his own analysis in his notebooks, is not a psychologist, but a "realist in a higher sense", portraying the depths of the human soul. (*PD*, p.277) For us, therefore, the least accurate translation used only in André Markowicz's French edition is 'hystérie', in Russian, 'isterika'. This medicalising word strikes us as too clear-cut to do justice to the depth with which these behaviours are a part of the universe in which they occur, rather than being dictated by the humours of individual characters. These characters are instead responding with existential turmoil to very particular circumstances and partner characters.¹³⁹ The translation which seems to us closest to 'nadriv' is Magarshak's "heartache", which gives the idea of a possible sincere beginning which could pivot into unnatural romanticising, self-dramatisation and a tearing between alternatives, without the tearing itself necessarily taking place: the rent is instead maintained in a destructive present in which the despair of the spectacle supplements the destitution of the contemplator.

Dostoevsky's thinking on "nadriv" occupies many different registers, though characterises most often the moment at which a grain of over-determination enters the willingness to undertake a responsible act. This can be spoken with the equanimity of a not too grievous sufferer, as in the case of the

¹³⁸ Irina Levotina, 'Dostoevskian Nadriv', *Itogui*, 34, (1997), <<http://www.stengazeta.net/article.html?article=2547>> (para. 2 of 10) [accessed 24 January 2008] Olga Nezman is thanked for the translation.

¹³⁹ Instances of nervous illness are widespread in the novel, but like 'nadriv', are difficult for the sufferers themselves to recognise. See the ironic exchange between Alyosha and Mme Khokhlakov, in which she asks why she is never "hysterical". (*BK*, p.679, Book XI, Chapter 2)

very attractive Trishatov character, who tells Arkady, in *The Adolescent*, that he wants to help him, but will not shake his hand or sit down as he is enforcing a judgment he has cast upon himself: "I'll still find it pleasant to remember when I'm carousing dishonestly." (*AD*, p.503) This recognition of self-destructiveness is very wistful and its self-admiration, like its masochism, is fairly mild. There are, however, more serious instances of 'nadriv': Prince Andrei Petrovich, for example, who is persuaded by Arkady's sister, Lise (whom he has impregnated), that if he were to make a full confession of an incident in the army, "resurrection into a new life would be impossible". (p.301) Having after this incident become indirectly involved with fraudsters, he confesses to everything at once, (also denouncing Vasin out of jealousy over Lise (p.412)), and collapses his world into that epicentre of infinite sacrifice mentioned in Chapter One. We also think of Stavrogin's confession phrased with moments of callousness in which he is "luxuriating in [his] own psychology" (*SC*, p.72), a tendency which is at odds with his will to expiate. Tikhon fears that the rebellion involved in such assaults on his reader will lead him to throw himself upon another crime in order to escape his self-imposed punishment. This phenomenon, in a slightly different form, can even follow fully bipolar traits: for example, in the case of the mysterious visitor in the *The Brothers*, whose will to expiate is quickly succeeded by his will to kill once again. It is, as Levinas comments in 'Philosophie, Justice et Amour', ethics which creates the bridge between ontologically separate beings. (*EN*, p.120) From a political and eschatological point of view, "heartache" is a major obstacle to new life, in that after creating an ethical connection, the fact of being ontologically separate is treated as a condition of enjoyment; or, for the mysterious visitor, even as a condition for personal survival. The visitor, like Stavrogin, dramatises both his former crime and his expiation. As foreseen in Tikhon's prediction, while the visitor is sincere, his turmoil expresses itself against the Other once more, and targets the young Zossima who has been identified or dramatised as the visitor's own accusing double. While the messianism is real, and this self-dramatisation not conscious, the visitor is divided between love and detestation, so violent is his inner confrontation. Thus, from

having felt ethically linked to Zossima, he is now ready to murder in order to affirm himself as ontologically distinct. An extra layer may be added to this: an ethical link can provoke an *aisthesis* that persists in changed form, even after a retreat is made back into ontological distinction. We think of Lise deploring people's excitement at Karamazov's murder, from which she intuits they may be deriving some secret pleasure (*BK*, p.681); then comes her own dream of eating pineapple compote, whilst enjoying the spectacle of a crucified child (p.685). This is not so far from the universal laughter that Tikhon warns Stavrogin will follow his confession. (*SC*, p.77) We shall seek to relate this observation back to the relationship of Giacometti's art to prostitutes.

If "heartache" is not present in this art, it is because the prostitutes are avoided as models, with the attendant possibility of being commanded by their alterity. In this instance, faced with that which is ravishing, Giacometti prefers an attitude of submission. This connection, across a divide over which one may not be able to deliver, may result instead in the use of the other as a pornography of the good. We are not claiming that this is what Giacometti does, he who never looked contemptuously at any person or thing, but that Genet has deliberately inserted a doubt into his notion of the wound, which would otherwise function happily as a source of uniqueness and of a proto-ethics.¹⁴⁰ This doubt is a great clue for examining Genet's oeuvre. It resembles the danger in aesthetics of an "égarement dans la sensation" (*DEE*, p.85), which can supplant actual responsibility to the other through mere sense impressions, through which people may take deliberate advantage of their inability to focus both on the foreground and on the background, and ostentatiously help a person whilst ignoring a people. (*AC*, p.144-45) In this case, assistance offered to the other may deliberately ignore the Third; or still worse, the ignoring of the Third may turn out to be the

¹⁴⁰ "Je ne pense pas qu'il ait porté une fois, une seule fois de sa vie, sur un être ou sur une chose un regard méprisant. Chacun doit lui apparaître dans sa plus précieuse solitude." *AT*, p.62. Having said this, there is a moment at which the difference between them seems to become strained as Genet is afraid that he is irritating Giacometti by talking to the blind man in the café. (p.65) This distance was very well accentuated in the dramatisation by Philippe Chemin, as the actors in dialogue never faced one another. Paris, Théâtre de Gennevilliers, November 2005.

precondition for administering to a single other in escapism. This would, once more, reproduce a kind of pornography.¹⁴¹ As Genet remarks,

Le vrai luxe pour l'œil, c'est de pouvoir couvrir du regard un homme pauvre, ou des conditions de vie misérables, comme un objet décoratif. (AC, p.143)

But then, what of the "misère infini" examined above? (*Frag*, pp.82-83) Does it not risk becoming a decoration, and has this not, perhaps, always been a danger? Continuing with the following passage from 'Les Palestiniens':

Incapables de vivre dans un univers entièrement fonctionnel, il nous faut au moins poser notre regard sur quelque chose qui paraisse immuable ou hors du temps. (AC, p.143)

He is speaking of the needy, the vulnerable in the Other. In a very similar way, Genet comments in his 1975 interview with Hubert Fichte, "je voudrais que le monde ne change pas pour me permettre d'être contre le monde." (*ED*, p.156) Such an observation is not unique, but it is rare to find such an antisocial view offered as someone's open politics.¹⁴² This sterile symbiosis also forms part of the description of the proximity between the Mechouar Palace and the shantytown in *Un captif amoureux*, as poverty dreams about riches and *vice versa*. (*CA*, pp.84-

¹⁴¹ Dostoevsky puts us on guard, however, as an accusation of the pornography of the good may equally be an excuse for the subject to claim non-involvement. An example is the criticism drawn by the woman in *The House of the Dead* offering handmade cigarette boxes to the prisoners. (*HofD*, p.112.)

¹⁴² See the following example recounted by Dorian Grey, "You remind me of a story Harry told me about a certain philanthropist who spent twenty years of his life in trying to get some grievance redressed, or some unjust law altered – I forget exactly what it was. Finally he succeeded, and nothing could exceed his disappointment. He had absolutely nothing to do, almost died of *ennui*, and became a confirmed misanthropist." Oscar Wilde, *A Picture of Dorian Grey*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p.128. Also see John Llewelyn's essay on Levinas and J.S. Mill's autobiography, from which the Wilde anecdote is probably adapted, 'Introduction to Metaphysics' in *The Middle Voice of Ecological Conscience* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

86)¹⁴³ Here, there is no inclination to change the order, merely to savour them as an individual from the most advantageous position.

Genet pursues his political-aesthetic musings with an observation that could have come from 'La Réalité et son ombre'. He observes of *Les Désastres de la guerre* by Goya: "Nous sommes tellement absorbés par la légèreté et la vitalité du trait de Goya que la beauté du spectacle nous fait oublier de condamner la guerre qu'il représente." (AC, p.164) The point of similarity with the Levinas text is in the clear disengagement of art that they both postulate. And yet, parallel possibility opened up through art, which we examined in Valéry in Chapter One, may create something quite new, and, indeed, opposed to politics. Precisely because it is disengaged, it attacks order whether it happens to be that of a former regime or a new one introduced by revolution. Art acts in the liminal space between the world and its rerendering, between values imposed by law and other values, cooperating with neither. This is why, in his introduction to George Jackson's prison letters, Genet writes that "la poésie contient à la fois la possibilité d'une morale révolutionnaire, et ce qui paraît la contredire." This is because it resonates otherwise than with a securely achieved order, stimulating alteration rather than repose. (ED, p.63) The apparent contradiction Genet mentions would lie in the 'irréalisation' art produces, in that rather than being straightforwardly unreal, the artwork awakens unrealised alternatives to the senses, to which the art consumer lends their imagination by suspending their disbelief. So whereas in the Fichte interview, Genet cites the danger of a revolutionary government imitating culturally and artistically the one that had gone before (p.152), he had already elaborated a possible solution to that problem three years previously, when he wrote, "Le devoir de la révolution est d'encourager ses adversaires: les œuvres d'art." (AC, p.164) This is to say that rather than aestheticizing our view of war or turmoil, art should operate as a form of opposition – neither official, as in a shadow cabinet, nor unofficial, as in protest. On the contrary, through being disengaged, art works on every aspect of

¹⁴³ See also its prototype in 'Les Palestiniens' from 1972. (AC, pp.143-145)

experience, and only behaves as opposition in so far as this can raise traces of alterity from unexpected quarters, which may confront actuality in a new way. This is also why Genet admires Giacometti's respect for the solitude of objects. A social art, or a politically engaged one, would short-circuit the work of the artist and ally itself instead to an order.¹⁴⁴

So, if disengaged, the experience of art can be a test in discerning confrontations with different orders, as the commandment of the other one responds to is constantly supplemented by other others in the Third. Thus we are made aware of the offering up of the immeasurable Third, both in the sense of thwarted efforts to calculate its needs, and the possible sacrifice that neglecting these efforts could involve. Therefore, within a limited and controlled frame, the experience of art gives insights into the way the Other is able to come to mind. Let us return to Versilov's analysis of painting and photography in *The Adolescent*. There, the photographer finds the subject as it is, whereas the painter, though we could also say the writer, divines and represents main thoughts, related to idea-characters we examined in Chapter One. Versilov goes on to explain that in a photograph "it's quite possible that Napoleon at some moment, would come out stupid and Bismarck tenderhearted." (*AD*, p.459) In short, the main idea of a character may be changed, such as when a barbaric ruler is able to outmanoeuvre the image held of them using the media, throwing the claims of the rest of the world into disarray. This in part explains the mix of reality and illusion in Genet, who could be said to simulate photographs, images or documents as part of the real world, whilst changing their 'main idea' deliberately, both bringing them to our attention, and leaving them out of our reach.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ An example that comes to mind in a pseudo-Genetian line is Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*, in which a political engagement is claimed in the author's preface with a quotation dubiously attributed to Genet and which is not sourced, "the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorised repression". (p.245) Very quickly gender preoccupations upstage ones of race, as in the scene in which, Clive, a colonial administrator, encourages his mulatto valet to disrespect his own wife. 'Cloud Nine' (1979) in *Caryl Churchill Plays*, vols 3 (London: Methuen, 1985-97), 1 (1985).

¹⁴⁵ We think of Ron Mueck's sculptures in which their hyper-realism is coupled at the same time with a kind of misframing of the observer who is drawn into a play of scale.

Art throws us into a recognisable world, though one that does not signify in the usual register.¹⁴⁶ Everyone has a face, Levinas tells us, as we mentioned in Chapter One, even a member of the SS (*EN*, p.244). Yet the representation of the face is another affair, as it must be represented at once in its asymmetry, and as signifying like a sign. We may agree with King Duncan in *Macbeth*, that “there’s no art/ to find the mind’s construction in the face” (I.4), as Genet renders murderers and traitors in the favourable light of his writing. But then, the duplicity of his writing style, which goes so far beyond that of an unreliable narrator, is exactly the way Genet turns the art consumer’s “recherche infinie de la beauté” (*AC*, p.164) from its passivity into an active disposition. It is, after all, for us to attribute meaning to the expressions of what Genet calls, in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, “ces belles têtes aux yeux vides” (*ND*, p.10), referring to the newspaper images of famous criminals with the eyes cut out, which he has used to decorate his cell wall. Genet’s perverse interiority, then, is able to refer at once to real interiority and behave as a stencil for others’: layering reality, role-play and duplicity between different subjects.¹⁴⁷

There is also a later comparison Querelle makes between the impenetrability of his own demeanour and that of the legendary sailor-criminal, Campi, “...sa physionomie avait des aspects changeants: de féroce elle devenait douce et souvent ironique”. (*QU*, p.228) Genet then complicates this assessment by reminding us that although enigmatic, it is an image; one might almost say a still life or *nature morte*: “nous savons que ce portrait de Campi, décapité le 30 avril 1884, fut fait après coup.” Genet finally compliments Querelle on his effort, and observes that although artistic, it is also accurate: “Pourtant il est exact puisqu’il interprète.” (*Ibid.*) Here, then, between Genet’s narrator’s animation of the faces decorating his cell walls, in which he solipsistically dictates the action, and Querelle’s ‘interpretation’ of Campi, we meet at once evidence of the asymmetry of the face, and at the same time, evidence of semantic bias. The faces

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Maurice Blanchot, ‘Le langage de la fiction’, *La Part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p.79.

¹⁴⁷ Genet presents us with a gallery of impenetrable criminal faces in the epigraph to the original edition of *Querelle*, to be found embedded in the text on pp.19-20 of the Imaginaire edition.

are ferocious, soft, ironic, friend, foe, but the moods congregate and overlap, such that the inventions of Genet's narrator and the interpretations of Querelle's character become melded, announcing at once their fictional character, and a certain objectivity. Querelle animates Campi, Genet animates Querelle, and yet Querelle is fictional, and Campi real. The depiction of the face in art, therefore, as simultaneously a source of expressivity and enigma, is of great interest, as it indicates the orchestration of the different moments of the flight of the *dire* in relation to which art is created.

The mode in which manifestations of the trace are treated is, therefore, all-important in writing. Levinas tells us that the trace is not the trace that has been placed there deliberately, as, for example, in a financial transaction. (*HdH*, p.66) He takes instead the example of the criminal who tries to commit the perfect murder, but who leaves behind clues, clues that are then followed by the detective. (*Ibid.*) Querelle muses on the impossibility of the perfect murder, and the mistakes which creep in unawares, of which he makes an offering to the divinity protecting murderers. (*QU*, pp.307-308) This explains his smile, which on the one hand seeks to tame the god, and in its sadness is also the expression of "l'absolue solitude que lui impose un destin si particulier." (p.308) His impression of his own separation is stronger than ever. This sensitivity has served to make of him a detective in his own right, one of essences and their vibrations:

La certitude de vivre dans un monde qui est le double silencieux de celui où effectivement il se meut, accordait à Querelle une sorte de *désintéressement* qui lui permettait de comprendre spontanément l'essence des choses. Habituellement indifférent en face des plantes ou des objets – mais se mettait-il en face d'eux? – maintenant il les appréhendait spontanément. Chaque essence est isolée par une singularité que l'œil reconnaît d'abord et communique au palais: le foin est foin surtout à cause de ce caractère poudre blanc et grisâtre que mentalement le goût interroge, éprouve. Et cela, pour chaque espèce végétale. Mais si l'œil permet la confusion, la bouche la détruit, et Querelle avançait lentement dans un

univers savoureux, de reconnaissances en reconnaissances. Un soir, il rencontra Roger. Il ne fallut pas longtemps au marin pour savoir qui était le gosse et pour réussir à pénétrer dans la cachette de Gil. (p.327, my emphasis)

Having disturbed the world's order through murder, he is now preternaturally attentive to the surrounding configurations: able to detect and corroborate through the relation between his different senses the smooth running of the outside world. What is termed 'disinterestedness' (*désintéressement*) is strangely that which allows him to apprehend isolated essence. His crimes have rendered him simultaneously attentive to the Other beyond being, whom he rejects, and to the circulations of being which implicate him. This is partially consistent with the "désintéressement de la subjectivité" to be found in sensibility in Levinas. (*AQE*, p.18, *AQEb*, p.31) The Levinasian proto-ethics of separation remains traceable in the situation of Querelle, as these others penetrate his solitude from the *en-deçà*, or near side of being; however, they are quickly thematised for reasons of self-preservation, and the response of responsibility is not made. (*Ibid.*)

Similar to the experience of 'nadriv', the masochistic admiration of one's own feelings of woe, Querelle will experience a particular attraction and revulsion to Gil, a fellow murderer. In the original version of the text, reproduced in the Imaginaire collection, Genet describes the conscience as a fortified room filled with wretched caged monsters, of which the most heart-rending is our "intime reproche", or "living reproach".¹⁴⁸ This can be compared to what Levinas describes as the "monstruosité de l'Infini *mis en moi*". (*DVI*, p.110) But whereas the monstrosity of the infinite is a kind of *monstration*, or showing, the monster occupying the centreplace of the room is kept in check: "Il ressemblerait à un gros poisson, n'était la tristesse très humaine de sa tête. Le dompteur qui surveille les monstres méprise surtout celui-ci qui nous le savons, trouverait quelque paix dans

¹⁴⁸ *ImQU*, p.166; *Querelle of Brest*, trans. Gregory Streatham (1966), (London: Faber, 2000), p.151.

l'étreinte d'un de ses pareils." (*Ibid.*) So while the passivity of remorse is alive in this "living reproach", the activity of the minder keeps not only repentance, but all society at bay. As though to avoid any drifting beyond being, Querelle accuses Gil not only of the murder of Theo, but also that of Vic, of which he is himself guilty. The reaction of Gil, now in a position of pure passivity and incapable of initiative, is described through a further evocation of flowing through the eyes. Whereas Genet's later description of this process in 'Rembrandt déchiré' results in the substitution examined in Chapter One (*CQR*, pp.22-23), here there is no movement of the one-for-the-other:

Gil se sentit blêmir. Sa vie, sa présence en lui-même, afflua dans ses yeux qu'elle sécha, s'échappa par son regard pour se perdre, se diluer dans les ténèbres du cachot. (*QU*, p.334)

The previous sequence of quotations can be thought of as the *conatus essendi* closing in on itself to form a "moi-substance" in the struggle for dominion of the subject, which the subject can ultimately only lose. (*EN*, p.220-21) While the 'vide solide' from 'Rembrandt déchiré' is the clearest formulation in Genet, there are stranger examples of *moi-substance* to be found, for example when Querelle secretes a bag of loot in a masonry wall:

Se voyant entrer dans la muraille dont tous les détails lui apparaissaient avec précision, son corps pénétrait dans le mur. [...] Il fut bientôt le mur et il le demeura un moment, sentant vivre en soi tous les détails des pierres, les fissures le blesser, par où coulait un invisible sang, d'où s'exhalait son âme et ses cris silencieux, une araignée chatouiller l'antre minuscule de l'interstice de deux de ses doigts, une feuille se coller délicatement à l'une de ses pierres humides. Enfin, s'apercevant d'être appuyé à la muraille dont il sentait une des aspérités mouillées, il s'efforça de la quitter, d'en sortir mais il en sortit talé à jamais, marqué par l'endroit très particulier

des remparts qui resteraient dans la mémoire de son corps [...]. (*QU*, p.304)

As Bataille points out, to the impenetrability of communal subjectivity is added the impenetrability of separate objects. (*LM*, p.149) The definitive version of Bataille's essay on Genet appeared in 1957, the same year as the *Atelier*, in which various critical responses made by Genet to Bataille may be discerned. We have already analysed the highly important remark: "ma solitude connaît la vôtre" (*AT*, p.73). But if an object can be endowed with solitude as well as can a person, then the relationships between things cannot be simply technical. It is not the objects exercising their will, but the interactions and ends associated with them that are of interest. In this way, the tie in *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs* remains part of the world of profane material exchange, but is at the same time one of the "instigateurs" of an act (*ND*, p.19), and shares in the capitalised personal pronoun "Lui", used to identify the victim who inspired the murder (p.183). Thus, we meditate on interhuman relations generally in their impenetrability, "l'impénétrabilité de nous-mêmes et du monde" (*LM*, p.149) described by Bataille, but in which so many things present a face, in which so many facets *font mine*.

We started this chapter by looking at a person inscribing a rock. At this point in our analysis, a rock inscribes a person and leaves a trace of the use to which it has been put. Whether it is a matter of illeity respected or illeity rejected, the intrigue – that is to say plot, thread, machination or seduction – of the infinite can place people in a relation of common drama, whilst not itself relativising that drama through a code of interpretation. Instead, it is the disordering movements of alterity which are dramatised. Thus, the intrigue of the infinite is part of the shared consciousness of incommunicability; part of what can draw people together who, as Levinas explains, and as we discussed in Chapter One, are "séparés absolument par le secret inexprimable de leur intimité" (*DVI*, p.221).

The myriad dramatic relationships opened up between subjectivities and objects interlace into a theatre of the invisible. In such a theatre, it would be

possible to dramatize the impenetrable aspects of life, which determine existence and only occasionally manifest a trace of their passage. We take, for example, the role of time examined in a 'Lettre à Jean-Jacques Pauvert'. Children are described playing a game of army:

La nuit, disaient-ils, allait venir. Mais il était midi dans le ciel. Ils décidèrent donc que l'un d'eux serait la Nuit. Le plus jeune et le plus frêle, devenu élémentaire, fut alors le maître des Combats. «Il» était l'Heure, le Moment, l'Inéluctable. De très loin, paraît-il, il venait, avec le calme d'un cycle mais alourdi par la tristesse et la pompe crépusculaires. A mesure de son approche, les autres, les Hommes, devenaient nerveux, inquiets... (GTC, p.818-19)

The child playing the capitalised role of the Ineluctable is thus part of the impenetrability of the world rendered visible. Though if one can have a child playing the sun in order for a battle to proceed¹⁴⁹, one can also have a man playing the moon so lovers might meet, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (V.1); or guards maintaining sun and moon and their different qualities of light, in the second tableau of Genet's *Le Bagne*. The ordinary lines of communication are, they too, seen in a light not of comprehensibility, but of the impenetrable. In Jean Rouch's *Les Maîtres fous* (1954), one of the Ghanans of the Hauka cult exorcising white power plays a locomotive, showing the impact of mechanical power.¹⁵⁰ Equally, Querelle can become part of the wall in which his fate is implicated, and Dmitry can lead his entourage to believe he is swearing on his heart, when he is, in fact, swearing on a bag of money round his neck belonging to Katerina. All these

¹⁴⁹ In *Joshua* 10.12-14, there is a similar measurement of time, and while the children abolished the sun in their game, Joshua had to petition God in order to be able to finish his battle.

¹⁵⁰ Genet also gave his approval to journalist Jean Cau for a close connection to be made between *NE* and *Les Maîtres fous* in an article: "L'un est le Gouverneur, l'autre le Général, tel autre la Femme-du-docteur, tel autre enfin la Locomotive qui, bien qu'étant un engin mécanique est supposée appartenir – à juste titre « poétique » – à la race blanche." Edmund White, *Jean Genet*, trans. Philippe Delamare (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p.423.

objects, like Giacometti's serviette, individually represent something of the drama of the world.

Might not this even create a situation in which these objects may, be they as inanimate as rock, contain the accusatory power of the face? Such is the case, perhaps, in Querelle's heightened anxiety, and his peculiar disinterest in the consciousness of guilt in proximity to his crime? In the site of his crime he displays not a personification of rock, but a petromorphism of the human in people like himself and Gill who may be *de marbre*, but who are not, for all that, without emotion. It is of these minute non-human enigmas that we have spoken in this chapter, rather than of the 'glowing nimbus' of a thaumaturgic encounter.¹⁵¹ We have also demonstrated the bridge in Genet's work linking a Levinasian trace of sensibility to a Derridian one of writing, and shown that the trace of the other in writing is apt to be reactivated by the sensibility of the body, pursuing the unique trace of something that has retreated.

These are the routes through which language as the *non-dit* may also lead to Saying, or, as Levinas puts it in the preface to the German edition of *Totalité et infini*, to a "[l]angage de l'inaudible, langage de l'inouï, langage du non-dit. Écriture!" (*TeIb*, III, *EN*, p.233) This chapter has been in partial response to the Derridian anxiety over the identity of the logos at work in Levinas's oeuvre, which leads Derrida to describe it as a writing coming in second place, one that is not preceded by originary voice, but which, nonetheless, elicits an answer.

The different ideas of hypocrisy we have been examining in this chapter have also been enlightening. While Querelle fails to repent and is certainly hypocritical, his could not be described as an 'indifference' to the death of the other, so disastrous is the impact of his murders on his own personality. If there is also a register of hypoCrisis in his relationship to Gill, in an ethical register of crisis, following which he must make a conscious effort to betray him and reject this responsibility, then considerable work has been carried out in the novel on the staging of the conscience and consciousness. Significantly, the etymology of

¹⁵¹ The articles of Querelle's thefts are imbued with the sacred through "une sorte de nimbe qui rayonnait d'elles". (*QU*, p.302)

hypocrisy is originally derived from the Greek 'hupokrites', which is to be an actor on the stage, 'a pretender or a dissembler'. Querelle quite clearly dissembles (*hupokrinesthai*), while our judgement (*krinein*) on him is as the judgement of a fiction upon which we are practicing our discrimination. The staging of the response (*hypo-krinein*) made to the other therefore raises questions that may be usefully treated through an examination of the use Levinas has made of drama and theatre.

Chapter III: Production

1. Theatre and witnessing

We have examined the way in which the intrigue of the infinite can be born out of the *il y a*, while the *il y a* does not have a part to itself in this intrigue. This means that the Anglo-Saxon use of the word ethical, which would accept an antonym, to point out, for example, ‘unethical behaviour’, which does not exist in French, certainly does not exist in Levinas’s philosophy. Levinas seeks the meaning of ethics, and not to construct his own. (*Eel*, p.85) He seeks to do this through the concreteness of that which is not thought as such in the human intrigue. This is shown through the drama of existence in Levinas’s use of hyperbole and emphasis:

L’emphase, cela signifie à la fois une figure de rhétorique, un excès de l’expression, une manière de s’exagérer et une manière de se montrer. Le mot est très bon, comme le mot « hyperbole »: il y a des hyperboles où les notions se transmutent. Décrire cette mutation, c’est aussi faire de la phénoménologie. L’exaspération comme méthode de philosophie!” (*DVI*, p.142)

Exasperation is the situation in which the subject has become engaged in spite of him or herself. ‘Production’ in Levinas is a technical term, like emphasis, hyperbole, and intrigue. It describes the situation of interiority, in which the subject both passively undergoes phenomena, and at the same time is strangely responsible for them. The working of this term throughout Levinas’s oeuvre will be examined in the course of this chapter.

“[L]a réalité scénique”, Levinas tells us, accomplishes itself without leaving anything physical behind: “elle ne laisse pas de traces.” (*DEE*, p.34) A play is played and then nothing remains: “un théâtre vide est affreusement désert.”

(p.35) For Levinas, any traces that are left in a theatre itself are of the actors playing the roles and not of the characters themselves. To take an example from the Old Vic, one is more interested on the stairs to see the framed photograph of a young John Gielgud, than one is by the Hamlet whom he is dressed as; or to take one of Levinas's examples, the memory of Sarah Bernhardt outlives that of the Phèdre that she played. (*Ibid.*) For the trace of the characters to be activated they require the donation of another's body, firstly of the actors and then of the spectators, as the spectator is left with the remnants of sound, image, and sense impression. Genet describes this process for the actor in *Pompes funèbres*:

Une âme est en peine à qui j'offre mon corps. Avec la même émotion le comédien aborde le personnage qu'il rendra visible [...] L'opération magique qu'ils accomplissent, c'est le mystère de l'incarnation. (*PF*, p.59)

This incarnation could also be a mode of substitution, in which the actor witnesses in place of another, voicing the character's alterity in what would otherwise be the silence of the empty theatre. This is the case of Genet's narrator in *Pompes funèbres* who offers these words in homage to Jean Decarnin. However, in spite of what Genet set out to achieve, he finally leaves us with a stronger impression of himself, the incarnator turned betrayer, than of the incarnated when he mysteriously allies himself with those responsible for Decarnin's death. As narrator-witness, Genet gives up his direct role of author and subjects his obedience and passivity before the memory of Decarnin to a receptiveness and obedience to the moral disharmony of the Occupation. That obedience comes from the Latin word *oboedire*, formed from *audire* 'to hear', is significant for our discussion of influence and adaptation. While the person or thing that is incarnated or adapted is dependent on its new medium, the incarnation or adaptation is also different from the original, and is therefore distinct. Forms and contents are borrowed from different times, which intersect in a present, in a process perhaps more properly described as underlapping than overlapping, due to

hidden layers of diachronic time. The silence and emptiness of the theatre itself preceding the performance may well be the same as that which follows it; but this does not prevent such silence from inscribing something in the inner-life, or inner-stage of each member of the audience, and also of anyone with whom they communicate afterwards. The end of the play and the emptying of the theatre could therefore be another underlapping, or underscribing, that may gain momentum and articulation. Genet explains in his first letter to Roger Blin that in such a way, one or several performances of *Les Paravents* could impose “une déflagration poétique, agissant sur quelques milliers de Parisiens”. But he goes on to include people other than those present, and indeed all others, by addressing the problem of the remnant in the spectator:

je voudrais qu'elle [la représentation] soit si forte et si dense qu'elle illumine, par ses prolongements, le monde des morts (ou plus justement de la mort – des milliards et des milliards – et celui des vivants qui viendront (mais c'est moins important?). (*GOC4*, p.221, *GTC*, p.845)

This would mean that those who had never attended the production would also be effected by it, even though, as Genet points out, this would not be predominantly in the sense of a physical troubling or disordering of the future world but, strangely, in the illumination or resonation of the silence of those now past; or the people of the dead we disussed in the *Atelier* in the previous chapter. Two directions of enquiry will be pursued in the present chapter: into the different types of action possible for the subject, in relation to itself and the other; and into the space implied by these different forms of action, in the private, public and communal. An examination of types of action on the one hand, and types of space on the other, will therefore form the two principle pathways in this chapter.

The background to Levinas's coining of 'production' is in proximity with his various other uses of theatrical terms and metaphors. Already in 'De l'évasion' (1935), Levinas describes the relationship between the ego and the self as not having a tautological structure but as concealing “une forme dramatique.” (*EV*,

p.98) This same relationship is described as ‘tragic’ in *De l’existence et l’existant*, as a basic form of determinism is uncovered, which yields the *il y a* in every moment. (DEE, p.143) In *Le temps et l’autre* Levinas seeks to examine “la place de la solitude dans l’économie générale de l’être.” (TA, p.18) In the following paragraph he goes on to add that Heideggerian *Dasein* does not enter into the economy of being with *autrui*, in so far as it is based on a structural rather than a practical relationship, playing no role in existential questions or in what he calls “le drame de l’être”. (Ibid.) This drama is described later as the possibility of futurity through pleasure in the caress. (p.83) The drama of internal relations to the self is therefore bound up with the relation to the Other in time.

Levinas describes the dramatic relationship of the ego and the self through phenomenological descriptions of anguish, as the subject is forced to abide in an abode which no longer provides protection from the exterior. He takes as notable instances nausea, insomnia, and laziness, which show unmastered being incompatible with economic life, and which reveal and ‘produce’ nothing but more of themselves. This makes the hinderance they represent impossible to displace. This is their only ‘accomplishment’.¹⁵² In this chapter we shall explore the structure of the ego and the self in its dramatic qualities.¹⁵³ Taking *la paresse*, first of all, which Llewelyn translates as ‘dilatoriness’, with its associated idea of delay Levinas describes it as follows:

La paresse se rapporte au commencement comme si l’existence n’y accédait pas d’emblée, mais la prévivait dans une inhibition. Il y a ici plus qu’un espace de durée s’écoulant insensiblement entre deux instants; à

¹⁵² ‘Accomplishment’ is used in this context in place of Heidegger’s *Ereignis* or ‘event’ as a way of describing the encounter with being. As Heidegger insists in ‘Letter on Humanism’, “The talk about [language as] the house of Being is no transfer of the image ‘house’ to Being.” Therefore, he does not mean it as a metaphor, but seeks through knowing the essence of Being to be more readily able “to think what ‘house’ and ‘to dwell’ are.” (BW, p.260) Levinas tries to think the dwelling and habitation in terms of mastery over being. By examining pure being in these early phenomenological analyses, he attempts to think the event of being as folded in upon the subject. What concerns us here is to think the implication of the human in being post-*il y a*, and that the thinking of Being as such is not possible for the human mind. Levinas then describes a preoriginary indebtedness to the Other which precedes fundamental ontology.

¹⁵³ Nausea (EV, pp.116-119), insomnia (DEE, pp.109-113), dilatoriness (p.34), and fatigue (p.42).

moins que l'inhibition de la paresse ne soit pas aussi la révélation du commencement que chaque instant accomplit par sa vertu d'instant. (*DEE*, p.33-34)

The subject's initiative is flattened out because dilatoriness presents itself, "*prae-esse*", but by definition can never reach a full state of preparation, "*parare*", and becomes itself "l'accomplissement du commencement." (*Ibid.*)¹⁵⁴ This is not yet an act, not yet the state of projectivity that Heidegger has taught us to expect from *Dasein*, in which "To accomplish [*Vollbringen*] means to unfold or lead something forth into the fullness of its essence – *producere*." (*BW*, p.217) Levinas does, however, adapt the notion of production, anticipating the way he will use it to describe the philosophical primacy of infinity, in which

l'infini se produit dans la relation du Même avec l'Autre et comment, indépassable, le particulier et le personnel magnétisent en quelque façon le champ même où cette production de l'infini *se joue*. Le terme de production indique et l'*effectuation* de l'être (l'événement « se produit », une automobile « se produit ») et sa mise en lumière ou son exposition (un argument « se produit », un acteur « se produit »). L'ambiguïté de ce verbe traduit l'ambiguïté essentielle de l'opération par laquelle, à la fois, *s'évertue* l'être d'une entité et par laquelle il se révèle. (*Tel*, XIV, *Telb*, p.11, my emphasis)

The ambiguity of the verb "se produire" is illustrated helpfully by Lingis in a footnote with a pair of examples in English. It carries the sense of a bringing about: "Art may make a Suit of Clothes, but Nature must produce a Man. *Hume*"; it also carries the sense of a bringing to light, "Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons. *Isa. xli, 21.*" (*Tal*, 26) "Se produire" can also be divided into other evocative verb and noun forms whose influence stretches deep

¹⁵⁴ Llewelyn brings to bear these Latin terms "*parare*", and "*prae-esse*". (*GE*, p.37, 39)

into the weft of Levinas's oeuvre. Llewelyn picks out the 'play' through which "l'infini se joue", is 'acted out', and relates it to the lack of physical inscription in being, which characterises "la réalité scénique" quoted above. (*GE*, p.31) One might tend to interpret the 'virtue' or endeavour of "s'évertuer" in producing a car, or an event, in terms of poesis, in other words as a task independent of interhuman relations bestowing a quality or effect. But one must also remember that in *De l'existence à l'existant*, it is 'by virtue' of the event of the elapsing instant that accomplishment is possible, and that this positioning may not get any further than positing itself "par sa vertu d'instant", as quoted above. (*DEE*, p.34) This involves the relating of the human intrigue to the intrigue of the infinite. The phenomena of the human intrigue are the events themselves of that which has taken place but have been experienced other than in simple thought. They instead illuminate "« l'intrigue humaine » – ou interhumaine – qui est la concrétude de son impensé, qui est la nécessaire « mise en scène » dont les abstractions se sont détachées dans le dit des mots et des propositions." (*EN*, p.229) This 'human intrigue', "mise en scène" or production, therefore stretches from the innermost event of consciousness to the outermost projects that the subject may undertake; this uses the *dit* to evidence the originary *dire*, and is the joining point between the human intrigue and the intrigue of the infinite. Thus, accomplishment might only be the endeavour of an endeavour, and may not accomplish the design it meant to effectuate, but may already be an active loop in a plural, interhuman world. The second part of the verb 'se produire', as 'se révéler', as is mentioned in the preface to *Totalité et infini*, is used to open this magnetisation of the of the individual and personal to our view. This would serve to render concrete this production, such that meanings illuminate the other's place in the drama or general economy of being. We might quote Levinas's essay 'Signature', in which he outlines his career, and returns to the production of the infinite which takes place in separation, but whose principle is not a state of sad solitude at the the other out of one's reach, but one of possible happiness in "jouissance". This would, as Levinas writes, represent a pluralism without totality. (*DL*, p.411)

In this sense, one thing can be produced as another, an object can be illuminated and leave a trace allowing the irreducible in the other to be signified, in spite of the absorption of the other in the interstices of the world. As Valéry's Socrates comments in 'Eupalinos' on the production of the artist, the world is an assembly of contradictory character: "les êtres vivants (et même les immortels), quand ils sont mis en œuvre par l'artiste, ne laissent pas d'être ce qu'ils sont, et de mêler leur nature et leur signification propre, au dessein de celui qui les emploie à exprimer sa volonté." (*Eup*, p.129) It is the possible incompatibility of this "mis[e] en œuvre" with the ethical production of the above "mise en scène", which Levinas draws our attention to in 'La Réalité et son ombre'. This may also colour the melding Genet makes of his nature with that of Decarnin, as he occupies an uneasy position somewhere between author and incarnator of his characters. Indeed, Valéry's Phaedrus first gives us the simple idea of multiple application: "Tel est le profit, et tel est le désavantage, d'être asservi aux objets réels; chacun d'eux est une pluralité de choses pour l'homme, et peut entrer dans une pluralité d'utilités différentes pour ses actes...". (p.130) This accumulation of qualities means that it is difficult to draw pure relationships between objects, as one loses track of the plane of comparison, and begins to receive erroneous intuitions which impose themselves with scientific conviction, as for example in the comparison of a ton of lead and a ton of feathers, or the one Valéry takes, which is the race between Achilles and a tortoise. This means that logical relationship is disturbed, such that the contemplators "pensent l'un, et pensent l'autre; et créant ainsi deux temps et deux espaces incommunicables" (*Ibid.*). For Socrates, thus, the different arts give insight into this underlying harmony through a multiplicity of explanations, and myths, producing "une infinité de causes imaginaires". (p.131) The summit of this for Valéry, as we discussed in the previous chapter, are music and architecture which measure the world without being representations, thus avoiding the problems of being under a *vocable*, referring to actual fact or an actual thing, since their primary qualities are as measurements or intervals:

[L]a Musique et l'architecture nous font penser à tout autre chose qu'elles mêmes; elle sont au milieu de ce monde, comme les monuments d'un autre monde; ou bien comme exemples, ça et là disséminés d'une structure et d'une durée qui ne sont pas celles des êtres, mais des formes et des lois.
(p.132)

This sharing of law and form is related to the immemorial underlying harmony examined above. Production in Levinas is not, therefore, a question of output; but comes instead as the event which activates the field of the infinite which, as we saw above, *magnetises the individual and the personal*.

Buildings may stand or fall and boats sail or sink, but the field in which the infinite is produced is drawn by the individualities that work with or dwell in them. Socrates did not notice his man-made prison wall because he was surrounded by friends: "La lumière du soir mettait la couleur de la chair sur les pierres de la voûte...". (p.108) When asked specifically about his experience of prison, in a comment that could almost have belonged to Zossima, Socrates answers that he is absorbed by the parallel possibility of the other selves that may have been his, who might have merited imprisonment for "crimes vagues et énormes". (p.206)¹⁵⁵ Elsewhere, there is a description of a ship leaving port: "la présence de l'horizon pur, la naissance et l'effacement d'une voile, l'émotion du détachement de la terre, [...] le seuil étincelant des contrées inconnues; et l'avidité même des hommes, toute prête à se changer dans une crainte superstitieuse, à peine lui cèdent-ils et mettent-ils le pied sur le navire... Ce sont en vérité d'admirables théâtres". (p.110) The poietic task of sailing a ship, therefore, shares a field with the dramas of the production of the infinite, through which the

¹⁵⁵ This following speech from Phaedrus in 'Eupalinos' seems to announce architecture's poietic function, "La pierre prononce gravement ce qu'elle renferme; le mur est implacable; et cette œuvre, si conforme à la vérité, déclare fortement sa destination sévère...". (*Eup*, p.107) Genet follows this in the *Journal du voleur*, "Au détenu la prison offre le même sentiment de sécurité qu'un palais royal à l'invité d'un roi. Ce sont les deux bâtiments construits avec le plus de foi, ceux qui donnent la plus grande certitude d'être ce qu'ils sont – qui sont ce qu'ils voulurent être, et le demeurent. La maçonnerie, les matériaux, les proportions, l'architecture sont en accord avec un ensemble moral qui laisse indestructibles ces demeures tant que la forme sociale dont ils sont le symbole tiendra." (*JV*, p.93)

individual rather than simply playing a part in a system, is called upon individually. Thus, the relationship of the ego to the self involves not mere separation but the positioning of the self as a production and responsibility: “La séparation est l’acte même de l’individuation”. (*TeI*, p.276, *Telb*, p.334) Across the vestibule of this interiority to the outside are received both the technical commands of the captain or foreman, and inspiration – a particular form of the intrigue of the infinite described in ‘Dieu et la philosophie’ as the manner in which “je me fais l’auteur de ce que j’entends.” (*DVI*, p.124) This is a form of witnessing from a position within being.

Rather than saying what Being ‘is’, something we are warned against in the ‘Letter on Humanism’, Heidegger came up with the *es gibt*, translated in ‘Letter on Humanism’ as “il y a l’Être”, and by the English translator Frank A. Capuzzi as “there is/ it gives”. (*BW*, p.238)¹⁵⁶ This giving, or *es gibt* is adapted in turn by Levinas, who explains that “l’objet, tout en existant, existe pour quelqu’un, lui est destiné, se penche déjà sur un intérieur et, sans s’absorber en lui *se donne*.” (*DEE*, p.75, my emphasis) This donation is not received in pure passivity, however, but is witnessed by the subject. To quote from the Levinas interview, ‘Questions et réponses’:

Les sensations sont produites en moi, mais moi je me saisis de ces sensations et je les reçois. Nous avons affaire à un sujet passif quand il ne se donne pas ses contenus. Certes. Mais il les accueille. Il se livre davantage quand il se dit; quels que soient les refuges du *Dit* – des mots et des phrases – le *Dire* est ouverture, un degré de passivité. (*DVI*, p.142)

So the subject is passive, but at the same time produces, conceives and welcomes contents, receiving them not as the *il y a* of Heidegger’s “il y a l’Être”, but as

¹⁵⁶ The expression remains flawed in English because of the pleonasm contained in the ‘is’ of ‘there *is* Being’. It is more satisfactory in the French *il y a* offered by Heidegger, as closer to the German *es gibt*. There is, of course, an obvious clue here to the origin of the term the *il y a* in Levinas which views the *es gibt* not as generosity but as bondage. Levinas emphasises this difference in meaning during his interview with François Poirié. François Poirié, *Emmanuel Lévinas: essai et entretiens* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1996), pp.101-103.

Dire. Something similar to this 1977 description of production by Levinas had already been given in 1964 in ‘La signification et le sens’, in which

rien ne peut se refléter dans une pensée avant qu’une rampe ne s’éclaire et qu’un rideau ne se lève du côté de l’être [...]. Le spectateur est acteur. La vision ne se réduit pas à l’accueil du spectacle; simultanément, elle opère au sein du spectacle qu’elle accueille. (*HdH*, pp.25-26)

The pronominal forms *se refléter*, *s’éclairer*, and *se lever*, are not merely passively intended, and do not have the character merely of a closed reflexivity; they instead signify prereflective participation of an interiority in what they perceive. This active and shared undergoing of being is described in *De l’existence à l’existant* through the form not of ‘on est’, but “on s’est”. (*DEE*, p.38) The subject is therefore implicated in what they are producing, but in such a way that, as Levinas explains elsewhere, “Tout ce qui advient dans le psychisme humain, tout ce qui s’y passe, ne finit pas par se savoir.” (*DVI*, p.212) What is experienced, then, is not merely the doubling of substantives by nouns, but at the same time, the temporalisation by the user of essence in the verb: “l’amphibologie où l’être et l’étant peuvent s’entendre, et s’identifier, où le nom peut résonner comme verbe et le verbe de l’apophansis se nominaliser.” (*AQE*, p.54, *AQEb*, p.72) This would also allow an adjective applied to a noun to stretch out into time in its verbal form. The nominalized adjective of red in ‘to redden’ has not only become a verb, but also resounds adverbially. (*Ibid.*, pp.50-51, *Ibidb*, pp.68-69) In this way, the Said is only reflected, illuminated or revealed, through the incarnated spectator-actor who, through the feeling subjectivity she or he brings to temporal events, pushes the different essences experienced in phenomena out of kilter¹⁵⁷:

¹⁵⁷ The passivity of the *spectateur-acteur* has been recast and rehabilitated since its first use in ‘La Réalité et son ombre’, where the subject is drawn into an environment of things as a thing: “extérieure à lui-même; mais d’une extériorité qui n’est pas celle d’un corps, puisque la douleur de ce moi-acteur, c’est moi-spectateur qui la ressens, sans que ce soit par compassion.” (*RO*, p.112)

Parler du temps en termes de fluence, c'est parler du temps en termes de temps et non pas d'événements temporels: la temporalisation du temps, ouverture par laquelle la sensation se manifeste, se sent, se modifie sans altérer son identité, se doublant – par une sorte de diastase du ponctuel – se déphasant – n'est ni un attribut ni un prédicat exprimant une causalité « sentie » comme sensation. (*Ibid.*, p.43, *Ibidb*, p.60)

'Diastasis' is a moment of stretching out and overflowing. Its biological meaning refers to the moment before the contraction of the heart at which no more blood can enter the expanded chambers, an instance of passive reception preceding action. It describes logical causality experienced through sensation, but which cannot be limited to sensation. It involves a loss of synchrony in language, as the meaning of the sensation is doubled up within and by the subject, without this being the result of an added predicate or attribute. This is lived experience, which overflows with meaning and fails to be contained by language.

Something which is named is designated by being, but also resonates there, retaining the possibility of becoming a verb once more. The Said of the name therefore contains vibrating essence. The reflexivity of language renders this amphibology of beings and being more complex. Having begun by drawing our attention to "s'être" in *De l'existence à l'existant*, in 'La Signification et le sens', Levinas places *se refléter*, *s'éclairer*, *se lever* in a special relation to the subject, who is "en face de l'être pour « accueillir le reflet », est aussi du côté de l'être pour opérer le rassemblement." (*HdH*, pp.25-26) In the same manner, he later asks, in *Autrement qu'être*, "Dire, n'est-il que la forme active du *Dit*? « *Se dire* » revient-il à « *être dit* »?" (*AQE*, p.55, *AQEb*, p.74) This rhetorical question draws our attention to the reflexive pronoun "se" and the recurrence it produces which cannot be understood merely as the passive form 'is Said', as the subject also colours the Saying. Like the "je m'écrivais" that Derrida reads into the "je m'éc..." of 'Rembrandt déchiré' examined in the previous chapter, this is a situation in which the subject is both agent and patient before the other. Its discreet passive-accusative form means the subject participates in the attendant

verbs, hither or beyond their function as an activity, or as a state. This passivity is a movement out of phase with the Said, a reduction which is also a tracing backwards or a “remonter” to the initial Saying. (*Ibid.*)

The Saying is not a representation, but instead a connection to the face which makes all discourse possible. As Levinas mentions in *Éthique et infini*, through all literature “parle – ou balbutie, ou se donne une contenance, ou lutte avec sa caricature – le visage humain.” (*EeI*, p.115) Great literature ‘speaks with’ rather than ‘appearing as’ (“apparaissant par”) the human face. (*OBL*, p.8) When the saying comes about, it is through the relation to the Other, in a “Dire d’avant tout Dit.” (*AQE*, p.56, *AQEb*, p.75)

The *Dire* this occasions in the subject will then become a *Dit*, but this must not be allowed to claim the status of representation or theme, as this would result in the Said, once recorded, becoming an aeon, which is a manifestation of the divine, setting itself up as an idol independent of the living world. Valéry picks up on such a danger repeatedly in his ‘Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci’, in the risk of declaring universal what are mere stages in over simplified thought. These universals would be “idolâtries”, which exercise an unavoidable kind of hypnosis over the subject. (*VOI*, p.1161, 1162, 1192) Levinas therefore adds that it is the task of philosophy to note the dictation of the *dire* into what is recorded in the *dit*, and then to reduce the *dit* in its turn, producing an echo in the *dire*. The result would be to retain “malgré la réduction, sous les espèces de l’ambiguïté – sous les espèces de l’expression dia-chronique, le *Dit* dont le *Dire* est, tour à tour, affirmation et rétraction – l’écho du *Dit* réduit.” (*AQE*, p.56, *AQEb*, p.75) The ambiguity of the echo of the *Dit* allows an openness to the *Dire*. If this enables philosophy to respect alterity, it also figures in literature in the implicit which may allow the Said to be both recognised and pushed out of phase.

In the unreduced aeon, the Said would function idolatrously as Levinas argues in ‘La Réalité et son ombre’, removing the contemplator’s freedom. Bakhtin’s peculiar mistrust of theatre and poetry, which we discussed in Chapter One, could perhaps also be compared to the aeon, as he understands the poet or

playwright as having the final word, as having definitively reduced the *dire* and removed language from its source in alterity. While we have already mentioned the later exception Bakhtin would make for theatre, he prefers the echoing ambiguities of the said, affirmed or retracted by the saying, in the way this said is reduced in novelistic prose by a heteroglossia of other saids and the dialogic pauses or hesitations between them. While Levinas is highly sensitive to the poetry of Célan and Shakespeare, he will in a similar way to Bakhtin refer to prose in its role as the reproduction and reduction of the Said. He explains that the “essence dite” of the meta-language of art is brought back to “l’essence proprement-dite”, which is the “logos qui résonne dans la *prose* de la proposition prédicative.” (*AQE*, p.53, *AQEb*, p.72, Levinas’s emphasis) This, “the world’s prose”, as Llewelyn puts it (*GE*, p.181), could be seen to tally with Bakhtin’s preferred genre. In each case therefore we are moving from the result of a reduction of the Said and not from a privileged view of Saying at its origins. Thus a single voice sharing in the Said, by reducing it, may cease to be single, and have instead emanated from the anarchic source of language in the other.

Inspiration is a manner in which the subject is witness, whereby “un Dire d’avant tout Dit” (*AQE*, p.53, *AQEb*, p.72) interjects in such a way that the reflexive “me dire”, becomes an accusative “me voici”. One very clear such example not unknown to Sartre would be *Le Véritable Saint Genest* by Rotrou, in which the original script is supplemented by a divine whisperer, carrying the represented action into the order of the real and concrete through the conversion of the lead actor, Genest, who assumes the role of the Christian martyr he is playing. This creates a saying from the interrupted said of the script. Sartre would seem to draw into question the way in which Genet’s writing is also receptive to the call of the other in the ambiguities of its said.

In this way, the said is reproduced, and yet also allows the Other to be heard. As in what Henri Gouhier calls an *art à deux temps*, the said is resaid, and both interrupts and rerenders the essences that have been congregated in the

artwork, even before the work of exegesis.¹⁵⁸ Production, in Levinas's emphasised (em-phaon-omenological)¹⁵⁹ sense, is a kind of deduction beyond the phenomenological reduction, rendering sensible the "l'un-pour-l'autre". (*AQE*, p.58, *AQEb*, p.77) This deduction allows one thing to be produced as another. As Levinas explains in the preface to *Totalité et infini*, "L'analyse intentionnelle est la recherche du concret", the search for that which signifies concretely for the subject. (*TeI*, XVI, *Telb*, p.14) In a similar way, Levinas says in the *avant-propos* to *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, that he seeks to describe "la « mise en scène » concrète de ce qui se dit en guise d'abstraction." (*DVI*, p.7) These two quotations point to the reality of the subject's diastasis as meaning overflows from language. Returning to the preface to *Totalité et infini*, Levinas writes:

L'éclatement de la structure formelle de la pensée – noème d'un noèse – en événements que cette structure dissimule, mais qui la portent et qui la restituent à sa signification concrète, constitue une *déduction* – nécessaire et cependant non analytique – qui, dans notre exposé, est marquée par des termes comme « c'est-à-dire » ou « précisément », ou « ceci accomplit cela » ou « *ceci se produit comme cela* ». (*TeI*, XVII, *Telb*, p.14, my emphasis)

Let us pause a moment on this last quotation. We remember our special usage of exposition as akin to the production of an actor as "mise en lumière", which we evoked above in response to the preface to *Totalité et infini*. (*Ibid.*, XIV, *Ibidb*, p.11) If in deduction as production *this* can be produced as *that*, then Levinas is drawing our attention not only to the precautions he is taking when talking about being, but to the grounds for the *play* of the intrigue of the infinite from within being, moving beyond ontological production in the light cast by thematisation.

¹⁵⁸ Henri Gouhier, *Les arts à deux temps* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989).

¹⁵⁹ From 'phainesthai' meaning to appear, and 'phaos' meaning light.

The ontological character of light is dwelt upon in the Levinas's 1947 texts. As *Monsieur Teste* bears out, the levelling effects of light are considerable. However, the *mise en lumière* operated by a subject is a situation in which the subject is itself also illuminated. As Teste says to his companion, the narrator, of the audience, fixed by the light of the stage,

« L'éclairage les tient. »

Je dis en riant: « Vous aussi? »

Il répondit: « Vous aussi. » (*M.T.*, p.27)

While of course it is the shared light and the shared *scene* or stage that makes the one-for-the-other possible, Derrida criticises in *Totalité et infini* what he describes as the effort to empirically describe the claims of the absolutely other. Derrida quotes Hegel saying that “l’empirisme oublie toujours au moins ceci: qu’il se sert du mot être. L’empirisme, c’est la pensée *par* métaphore qui ne pense pas la métaphore *comme telle*.” (*VeM*, p.204) So, as soon as Levinas uses the verb to be we are once more in the situation of describing the *beyond* being *with* being. The use of ontologised language, in so far as the verb ‘to be’ is employed, as Levinas points out, is something Derrida himself does not, and indeed cannot avoid. (*NP*, p.185) In this case, as Llewelyn puts it, “to think of metaphoricity as such is to think of being again, a metaphor more or less.” (*GE*, 179) Whatever is coined is in an explicatory role, and seeks revelation – to tear the veil of being.¹⁶⁰

Llewelyn points out that according to a Parmenidian-Heideggerian thesis, “being and thinking are one” (*Ibid.*), such that to think a metaphor obliges the thinking of being.¹⁶¹ Levinas overcomes this problem of an unavoidable relation

¹⁶⁰ In ‘Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral sense’ Nietzsche explains that the original faces of verbal exchange have been lost, and so are restruct by the artist in order to make their metaphorical role vivid once again. (*GE*, p.163) As Bakhtin says, one word reconceptualises (*DI*, p.279) another and recolours the transparent neutrality of its use, while any new expression starts metaphorically and is reabsorbed into general usage. As Llewelyn observes, Levinas’s technique is not to neologise, but to pre-ethically paleologise (*GE*, p.164) by showing the ethical non-metaphoricity next to ontological non-metaphoricity. (p.178)

¹⁶¹ “The word *metaphor* means carrying something from one place to another, and it comes from the Greek words *μετα* (which means *from one place to another*) and *φέρειν* (which means *to*

to being in his own writing by supplementing the thinking of being with the difficulty of substitution. Substitution involves the claims of the other taking priority over the subject's own, without them being ontologically predetermined; thus he argues not for an *affiliated* being otherwise, but for *the discrete influence* of an otherwise than being. If in ethical non-metaphoricity something is 'carried over' (meta-phore), for Levinas it is done through production. For him production is not the same as representation. Production concerns the implication or manner of engagement of the *disengaged* subject in the social relation, in "la présentation de l'Autre au Même". (*TeI*, p.188, *TeIb*, p.235) This bringing of the for-itself into contact with alterity allows a preoriginary for-the-other to be distinguished from Heideggerian being.

So what of the paradoxical question of passivity in Levinas's idea of production? How can something occur in passivity, and still be the production of the human, interhuman, and transcendent intrigues, which presumes a certain bringing-forth? Levinas answers this interim enquiry in *Autrement qu'être*, by saying that the book demonstrates "la défaite ou la défection de [...] l'actualité originaire de tout acte, source de la spontanéité du sujet, ou du sujet comme spontanéité." (*AQE*, p.179, *AQEb*, p.220, Levinas's emphasis) Spontaneity is replaced by something similar to the "passivité foncière" of 'La Réalité et son ombre', but not in the form of an endless participation. (*RO*, p.111) This time, however, passivity is inflected as illeity, to give us a "passivité de la passivité", ruling out a reversal back into activity, like "une cendre d'où l'acte ne saurait renaître". (*AQE*, p.182, *AQEb*, p.223) Substitution of the self for the other, implicates the subject in the difficulty of action in response to the Other, though at the additional price of the loss of the subject's bearings. An originary actor met in the trace effectuates something upon the subject that cannot be simply reversed.

carry), and it is when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn't. This means that the word *metaphor* is a metaphor." Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), p.15.

See also the autistic hero's dream in which he is the last person left on earth, which bears comparison with Blanchot's childhood scene in which the realisation of his finitude comes as his first secret. *L'Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p.117.

Denis Guénoun describes such a transcendent actor as being “sans acte, sans action et sans actualité”.¹⁶² This encounter is characterised by a *Dire* without a *Dit* (*AQE*, p.188, *AQEb*, p.231): not an act, but, as Llewelyn observes, a dighting, *Dichtung*, diction, or, we might add, through the Latin *dictare*, an order. (*GE*, p.171) This is a dialogic diction which gives us a command without content in the Saying, serving to ‘expose exposition’.¹⁶³ This exposition is also significant in understanding the address, made to the self alone, which may elicit the “me voici”, whereby the self is addressed as a singularity, and by a singularity in a plural ethical world. (*AQE*, p.186, n.11, *AQEb*, p.231, n.2) Thus, the manner in which the self is implied in production, we have seen, develops from an initial role of passivity. We will now proceed to examine this passivity in relation to different notions of action.

2. Drama, action and passion

Previous to 1961, the term drama was used by Levinas with some frequency and figures in *De l'évasion*, *De l'existence à l'existant* and *Le temps et l'autre*, quoted above. In an important footnote to the preface to *Totalité et infini*, Levinas explains the distance he will, from this point on, assume in relation to drama:

En abordant à la fin de cet ouvrage des relations que nous plaçons au-delà du visage, nous rencontrons des *événements* qui ne peuvent être décrits comme noèses visant des noèmes, *ni comme interventions actives réalisant des projets*, ni bien entendu comme des forces physiques se déversant dans des masses. Il s'agit de conjonctures dans l'être auxquelles conviendrait peut-être le mieux le terme de *drame* au sens où Nietzsche voudrait l'employer lorsqu'à la fin du *Cas Wagner* il déplore qu'on l'ait toujours à tort traduit par action. *Mais c'est à cause de l'équivoque qui en résulte que*

¹⁶² Denis Guénoun, ‘Le temple ou le théâtre: de la transcendance’, *Levinas et les arts*, Paris 4, 16-17 November 2006; conference proceedings to appear 2008.

¹⁶³ “[E]xposer l'exposition”. (*AQE*, p.182, *AQEb*, p.223)

nous renonçons à ce terme. (Tel, XVI, n. 1, Telb, pp.13-14, n.1, my emphasis)

If Levinas abandons the term ‘drama’ that would have perhaps best elucidated his argument, it is because of the confusion it might have lent to the distinctions he makes in the nature of production (to bring about, and to illuminate), as not being a *Dasein*, “réalisant des projets”, which, being poetical, would violate the idea of the infinite as command without content, as described above. Production is not comprehension and agency, but “mise en moi” of the idea of infinity, “le fait étonnant de contenir plus qu’il n’est possible de contenir”, that which I harbour, or to which I provide hospitality, but upon which I cannot act. (*Ibid.*, XV-XVI, *Ibidb*, pp.12-13) This is radical passivity. Yet, the question remains, in what sense does Nietzsche, in his bewildering footnote to which Levinas refers, think drama without action is possible? Here are Nietzsche’s comments:

It has been a real misfortune for aesthetics that the word drama has always been translated “action” [Handlung]. It is not Wagner alone who errs at this point, the error is world-wide and extends even to the philologists who ought to know better. Ancient drama aimed at scenes of great pathos – it precluded action (moving it *before* the beginning or *behind* the scene). The word *drama* is of Doric origin, and according to Doric usage means “event,” “story” – both words in the hieratic sense. The most ancient drama represented the legend of the place, the “holy story” on which the foundation of the cult rested (not a doing but a happening: dran in Doric actually does not mean “do”). (*CW*, p.174)

The reason Nietzsche gives for criticising Wagner is the forced-ness of his action, duping the audience into a kind of participation born out of heightened sensation, rather than logical sequence between action and character, as required by Aristotle

in the primacy of plot.¹⁶⁴ Wagner is said to start from the third act and work backwards (*CW*, p.174). Whilst determinism itself would not be at odds with absolute will, drama requires “*rigorous* logic”, and not contrived action. (p.175) In addition to which, neither the mystery of the will in Nietzsche, nor the “conjonctures dans l’être” beyond the face in Levinas (*TeI*, XVI, *TeIb*, p.13), are subject to action exerted upon them, but lie before or beyond the difference between the active and the passive, as the will is impenetrable, and *autrui* unreachable.

In the ‘Notes’ to *The Birth of Tragedy* (1869) – Nietzsche’s first book and one written in praise of Wagner – Nietzsche had not yet arrived at his strict definition of drama, expressed in *The Case of Wagner*, as not constituting a form of action. Consequently, he situates drama as coming after the origin of tragedy, which he roots in musical pathos. At this stage in his analysis, tragedy precedes drama and drama begins with dialogue: “L’action arriva dans la tragédie d’abord avec le *dialogue*. Ce qui montre que dans ce genre d’art, d’entrée de jeu, on n’avait pas du tout en vue le *drân*: mais le *pathos*. Ce n’était tout d’abord rien que le lyrisme *objectif*.” (‘Notes’, *NdT*, p.174; *Tam*, p.153) Whereas in *The Case of Wagner*, *drân* would mean the engagement of the subject in a story or event, its “scenes of great pathos” seem to bring it under the definition of tragedy too. Both the pathos of tragedy and the experience of drama, when understood as being implicated in a happening, represent related kinds of passivity, which we shall explore in the rest of the chapter. We shall return to Nietzsche’s position in this problematic later, and sum up at this stage in common with the older Nietzsche that drama is not expressive of action, although it already opens an element of dialogue, as argued by the young Nietzsche. We will turn now to a recent article on the subject.

¹⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin, 1996), 1450a, p.11. Nietzsche says that Wagner’s method is, however, safe as he disposes of a “genuine *actio*”, or persuasive delivery. This rhetorical figure, with its “hautrelief of gestures”, creates a scene which “throws people”: “this he thinks through in depth and from this he then derives the characters.” This is then formed into “strong scenes”. (*CW*, p.174)

Claire Nancy in 'La Raison dramatique' differentiates the use of the term *drân*, to undergo, from the terms *praxis*, Athenian for action between people, which in Aristotle is what is represented in *mimesis praxeos*; and finally, from *poiesis*, which is the realisation of a particular object or plan. An initial example is taken from the *Odyssey*, in which Ulysses explains that he will enter amongst the suitors: "« j'aurai tôt fait de bien *drân* avec eux tout ce qu'ils voudront », verbe assez obscur pour que le scholiaste traduise « servir, se faire esclave »." (Song XV of the *Odyssey*) There are also, we are told, instances of its use in religious texts and in the description of rites, putting oneself at the service of a god, with other traces of the word used to mean gesturing or miming. The theory Nancy ventures is that 'drân' means "se mettre au service de Dionysos en mimant. Le verbe désignerait exactement l'activité de l'acteur dionysiaque." (Nancy, p.113) This would mean that the Dorian claim to the invention of tragedy and comedy could be strengthened by the further claim to the invention of the word 'drân' which fills an insufficiency in Athenian verbs of action.¹⁶⁵ So, whereas in *poiesis* something is made out of nothing, *drân* accepts no substantive, except the neutral drama. You cannot drama something, you cannot be drama'd, and as soon as we start to speak of dramatisation, we are describing a genre, and not directly a mode of happening. *Dran* describes the passive engagement or implication of the agent in an action, unlike *prattein*, derived from *praxis*, in which the action it refers to is itself free of any particular agent or object. (Nancy, p.114)¹⁶⁶ If, as we shall maintain, *drân* is not an action but an event, and if it is part of the hypostasis of the individual, then it concerns the relation of the individual to being and to the production of the infinite. The infinite can only take place in the individual, not having a place of its own in being. Were we to take the example of Divine's speech at Notre-Dame's trial in Genet's novel, it would show the moment at

¹⁶⁵ Nancy then quotes from Chapter 3 of the *Poétique*, "Les Doriens, disait Aristote, « allèguent que pour dire 'faire' (*poieîn*), ils disent *drân* là où les Athéniens disent *prattein*. »". (Nancy, pp.113-14)

¹⁶⁶ See the comparison of the three terms in Denis Guénoun, *Actions et acteurs: Raisons du drame sur scène* (Paris: Belin, 2005), p.80.

which self-dramatisation meets drama in 'dran', as Divine alone is called to witness.

Claire Nancy goes further than this Levinasian description of the prereflective engagement of *dran* and describes it as a decision, engaging the individual, in the production of an outcome:

C'est le verbe qui autorise la distinction, introduit du jeu entre le fait de produire un résultat (comme Héphestos enchaîne effectivement Prométhée) et le fait de le décider, d'en assumer la libre décision. (Nancy, p.115)

It is therefore precisely the status of the decision which is in play. Nancy takes the example of Orestes' guilt in killing his mother, Clytemnestre, to avenge his father, Agamemnon. Oreste is responsible, *dran*¹⁶⁷, while from a pragmatic point of view, he merely carried out (*prattein*) Apollo's orders¹⁶⁸. It is because of the number of discrete pressures going to form this decision that it is a case of *dran*, in which will and responsibility may goad one another in complex interactions. This same distinction is shown within a single individual in *Agamemnon*, when Agamemnon's own need to sacrifice Iphigenia in order to wage war on Troy can be seen to contain the possibility of his own will introducing itself, which would mean that his daughter was sacrificed out of military ambition. This kind of staging, with which the Athenian theatre confronted its audience for the first time, opened the "jeu" or performance of the characters to the "enjeu, pour une possibilité pour l'homme de peser, de penser son rôle, et d'en revendiquer ou récuser les conséquences." (Nancy, p.116) What is at stake in the play is the possibility of the characters, as of the audience, to be able to view their behaviour: "confrontant l'homme au spectacle de sa propre décision. Cette scène, c'est

¹⁶⁷ Orestes: "Car j'en suis responsable [drân], tel quel, je ne le nierai pas." (l.613 in Nancy, p.115) And in the Fagles translation "Strike I did, I don't deny it no." 'The Eumenides', l.617. Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1977), p.258.

¹⁶⁸ The Eumenides addressing Apollo: "C'est toi seul qui as effectué (*prattein*) tout, puisque tu en es toute la cause." (l.200 in Nancy, p.116) And in Fagles, "You did it all, and all the guilt is yours." 'The Eumenides', Fagles, l.198. p.239.

effectivement le *drame*, c'est-à-dire, l'action où il s'engage, l'action en tant qu'elle l'engage et le détermine." (*Ibid.*)

To allow us to gauge the extent to which *dran* concerns action in the sense of its premise in engagement, we could take the example of King Lear, whose role of king insulated him entirely from the Poor Toms of this world. After the scene on the heath, he is able to say, "I have ta'en too little care of this!" (III.4); and also, as Levinas quotes as an epigraph to the foreward of *L'Humanisme de l'autre homme*, "I should e'en die with pity to see another thus." (IV.7) The reflexivity of this second statement bespeaks the pathos, or passion, at the root of action. It is this which constitutes the acuteness of *anagnôris*, or recognition scenes: a character realises he or she is the agent of that which they believed to have opposed or refused. Hence, the king may assume the role of the clown as is argued by Jan Kott.¹⁶⁹ Like Lear, who is "a man more sinned against than sinning" (III.2. 59), Oedipus explains before being driven to Colonus that he underwent rather than intended the acts that he performed: "Since my acts, at least,/ were acts of suffering more than actions outright –".¹⁷⁰ And then later: "Why even if I had known what I was doing [*dran*],/ how could that make me guilty [*prattein*]?"¹⁷¹ Between the French and the English translations, the sense of a 'happening', rather than a 'doing', is underlined in different ways. In Nancy's French version the situation is rendered as "ce qui m'a été infligé" (l.268), against Fagles's, "I was attacked"¹⁷², in which he allows himself a more stark use of the passive. The fact of miscarried intention, therefore, may result in action in terms of *prattein* as people interact in unexpected ways; only *dran*, however, is an

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964), trans. Boleslaw Taborski (New York/London: Norton, 1974), p.168.

¹⁷⁰ Sophocles, 'Oedipus at Colonus', *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles rev. edn (Penguin, London, 1984), ll.284-286. p.299.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, ll.291-293. As Nancy writes it: "...les actes qui sont miens, je le dis,/ m'ont été infligés plutôt que j'en suis coupable, [...] Et certes, comment puis-je être mauvais de nature/ moi qui, face à ce qui m'a été infligé, ai engagé en retour ce que j'ai engagé [*drân*]; /si bien que, si j'agissais (*prattein*) en connaissance de cause,/ même dans ce cas, je ne serais pas mauvais pour autant? (ll.267-274) p.118.

¹⁷² 'Oedipus at Colonus', l.290, p.299.

activity that has been owned, or that is owned, as it emanates from the relation of the self to its action, to which the self and only the self can reply.

Drama, then, for Nancy reconnects action to its source, to “la scène de sa décision, et le héros à sa propre détermination, à son autopraxie.” (Nancy, p.119) It is as though Levinas’s allegiance to drama were a quest to reach behind action to its part in the staging of the individual. This is not a space, as such, but the pressure and disorientation of substitution.

Plato and after him Hegel take a highly poetical view of the Greek State. Plato in *The Republic* requires that the actor not be allowed to “s’y produire”, favouring rather statecraft in the hands of rulers, whose task is qualified rather strangely in *The Laws* by the old Athenian when he exclaims, “we’re tragedians ourselves, and our tragedy is the finest and best we can create.”¹⁷³ This is meant to redirect the prestige of truth and nobility to the state, rather than to its artistic imitation. For Hegel, tragedy will be retained as a necessary element in an aestheticized ethics, linking the Greek State to the modern state via a speculative theory of religion. Before opening into a more general discussion of Hegel, we should display our intentions more clearly by discussing the unity of action in the *Aesthetics*, that will prove important in creating the ethical conflicts between state law and family law which are explored in *Antigone*.

The unity of action, as a collision between two characters and between opposing, mutually exclusive, ethical viewpoints and wills, presupposes a unity of conflict, whereby one character opposes another in his or her goal. (*Aesth*, pp.1166-67) Unity of action requires that action be born out of conflict. If the conflict can be described as two colliding arrows, then that which generates the meaning of the drama is as Hegel puts it, “the dissolution of the one-sidedness of

¹⁷³ See *The Republic*, III, 398, and the rest of the old Athenian’s speech in *The Laws*, which continues, “our entire state has been constructed so as to be a “representation” of the finest and noblest life – the very thing we maintain is most genuinely a tragedy.” (VII, 817bc) Plato, *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (London: Penguin, 2004), p.264. Also detailed in Taminiaux, *Tam*, p.29, 30.

these powers” (p.1163); whilst in the throes of the action, as Denis Guénoun sometimes describes this model of drama, *c’est le sens qui fait le sens*.¹⁷⁴ If we take *Dans la solitude des champs de coton*, Bernard-Marie Koltès identifies the premise for such a bipolar view of action in the formal difference between action and character. The action takes place along a straight line in a dark street between two lit interiors, and is unified by the attribution of will; that the Buyer put himself in the path of the Dealer deliberately, which translates into cooperation or conflict, a willingness or resistance in view of the other’s designs. The uncertain outcome of the collision of these arrows does not change the action’s form and the structure remains determined.¹⁷⁵ The dramatisation of Koltès is almost incomparably stripped down¹⁷⁶, but also holds true for larger more complex plots whereby the conflict comes to a head in like manner through a collision of wills or desires along a straight line. Oedipus wants to know what has cursed Thebes, and Creon finds out. The curse originated in a meeting of Laius and his son on the road to Delphi as neither father and son, (nor later mother and son) recognise one another. Of course, these models are highly deterministic, causing someone lost on roads that are far from straight nevertheless to reach a preordained finishing point for the dissolution of their drama. In this way, comedy can turn to tragedy, as forces collude:

Laïos, pour déjouer les prédications funestes, entreprendra ce qui est exactement nécessaire pour qu’elles s’accomplissent. Œdipe, en réussissant, travaille à son malheur. Comme le gibier qui sur la plaine recouverte de neige fuit en ligne droite le bruit des chasseurs et laisse précisément ainsi les traces qui feront sa perte. (EN, p.14)

¹⁷⁴ The formulation has been used at conferences, though the reasoning behind it is to be found in Part One, ‘Idées du drame’, in Guénoun, *Actions et acteurs*.

¹⁷⁵ “Le Client: [...] J’allais de cette fenêtre éclairée, derrière moi, là-haut, à cette autre fenêtre éclairée, là-bas devant moi, selon une ligne bien droite que vous vous y êtes délibérément placé.” Bernard-Marie Koltès, *Dans la solitude des champs de coton* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986), p.13.

¹⁷⁶ Guénoun, ‘Actions et acteurs’, p.75.

It would be irreverent to point out that Oedipus could have said simply ‘after you’, rather than confront the traveller, and that this could have interrupted the straight line of fate on the road to Athens¹⁷⁷; something which could also have been achieved had Oedipus invited Creon to complete his investigations, rather than being infuriated by them and making himself simultaneous to the crisis.¹⁷⁸ Once simultaneous to the crisis and saturated in being, the tragic genre exerts its own gravity such that the tragic protagonist cannot escape or adjourn its destiny.¹⁷⁹ However tragedy itself possesses a strange proximity to the comic in the difficulty of the struggle against destiny. After all, the tiniest element of a decision, partnered with the unlikeliest event, may obliterate an anxiously sought after increment of freedom. As Levinas observes in *L’Humanisme de l’autre homme*:

La mort rend insensé tout souci que le Moi voudrait prendre de son existence et de sa destinée. Une entreprise sans issue et toujours ridicule: rien n’est plus comique que le souci que prend de soi un être voué à la destruction; aussi absurde que celui qui interroge en vue de l’action les astres dont le verdict est sans appel. Rien n’est plus comique ou rien n’est plus tragique. Il appartient au même homme d’être figure tragique et comique. (*HdH*, p.90)

¹⁷⁷ “Après vous”. (*EeI*, p.84)

¹⁷⁸ Levinas recounts a tale by Max Picard, ‘Quelqu’un passe son chemin en bordure de forêt. Là se tient l’assassin. Le passant ne lui prête pas attention, car il se récite sa propre histoire. L’assassin ne peut rien. Comme si l’inattention de sa victime le séparait du monde du crime et ne laissait pas au geste meurtrier l’instant qui est nécessaire à l’acte d’assassinat, instant commun à l’assassin et de la victime. [...] Comme si dans son histoire personnelle – à condition de ne laisser vide aucun instant – l’homme trouvait refuge contre la contempotanéité.’ (*NP*, pp.145-46) This is also reminiscent of an account by Jorge Semprun describing the impossibility from his hiding place of shooting a nazi soldier while this latter was singing. Jorge Semprun, *L’écriture ou la vie* (Paris: Gallimard folio, 1994), pp.50-51.

¹⁷⁹ Another example would be *Phèdre*, in which the heroine’s fatal declaration of love can only lead her to the horror of an “engagement irrésiliable” to life and a fatal end. (*DEE*, p.102)

This merging of comedy and tragedy is not to deny the significance of suffering but to mark the astonishing disparity between the factors and possibilities that swarm around every interaction and the crude finality of mortal outcome.

Hegel sets the dissolution of opposing powers in the action of tragedy against the resolution of these differences in comedy, “revealed directly as inwardly self-dissolving”, because not fundamentally based on conflict. (*Aesth*, p.1163) In the complex events of life, however, powers are not usually mutually arresting, and do not reach the standstill of either dissolution or resolution Hegel mentions. There are instead traces left of different encounters which have an effect on the determinism of the unity of action as they mark crossing-points, alternatives, and invisible alterities. This effect can be thought, instead of as colliding arrows, as oblique arrows, braking, speeding up or cutting off the action of the unity of conflict.

As a first alternative to the Hegelian unity of action in the *Aesthetics*, let us look at a text familiar from our earlier analyses, *The Brothers Karamazov*. The initial unity of action is a conflict between Karamazov senior and Dmitry over the latter’s inheritance, although the reader quickly understands that the father’s life is in danger. The strongest, straightest arrow pointing in that direction, even from the early chapters, is Dmitry, with Ivan as an almost completely excluded alternative. The characters opposing the accomplishment of the murder number at least three, firstly Alyosha and Zossima, but also Smerdyakov, who is considered to be a faithful servant. If two of them are trying to undo (*défaire*) the imperious climax to the action in the murder, then the one we least expect defects (*défait*), undoes the expectations of the reader and commits the murder. In spite of the imminent trial, Lise later comments that, in fact, everyone in their community approves of the murder as an outcome, as we mentioned in Chapter Two. This leads to her having dreams in which violence figures as aesthetic spectacle. (our p.158) There is an old woman in the opening sequence with Zossima, however, whose confession, it is implied by Dostoevsky, is that she either willed, or simply

felt no sorrow at her abusive husband's illness and death; this sin of thought is forgiven, for she leaves with a smile. Such a sequence of events would mean that she had inadvertently been drawn into a unity of conflict with her husband, which then persists, in that she has momentarily found an ally in the illness which carried him away. It is the conflict's continuing momentum which mars with guilt any release she might feel. (*BK*, pp.55-57) This is similar to the unity of conflict into which Ivan enters with his father, which afflicts him with such serious feelings of culpability that he grows to believe that he and he alone is guilty of his father's murder. This multiplicity of arrows and their ability to change direction shows that there are not merely two singularities of will in conflict with one another, but already within a single individual bipolar tendencies, surrounded by other indirect forces, able to be reactivated from the trace. This implies another model of action whereby the community does not carry destiny as a single unit with dissolution as its outcome. Indeed, as Genet remarks of *The Brothers*, every act in its tiniest aspects is able to misfire and produce its opposite, in an instability of peripeteia that is more easily associated with comedy than tragedy: "Tout acte a donc une signification et la signification inverse." (*ED*, p.214) But this is not a comedy which is "self-dissolving", but instead one in which the direction of action and of sense can be inverted by changes at such a micro level that indirect valencies of meaning are implied which are not exhausted in the complementarity of the Hegelian outcome, whether it is found in the dissolution of tragedy or comedy. There is instead something exterior to these endings.

To examine exceptions to the rule of single outcome, we will look at the expansion of a play's events to include other wills and the way this may generate meaning. We turn to Arthur Schnitzler's *Reigen*, translated in English as *Round Dance*, in which the structural unity of action we saw in Koltès's *Dans la solitude des champs de coton*, which is shared between only two characters, is shared instead between a series of couples, sub-units of action forming the unity of action as carried by the community as a whole. Here, the final dissolution of the conflict of wills described in Hegel occurs from the start in a kind of consensual

overlapping, rather than in confrontation, as ten scenes show ten different sexual encounters; A with B, B with C, all the way to the J with A, which completes the effect of circular unity.¹⁸⁰ The motivation of the dramatic gesture is at once shared and atomised. The events in Genet's *Le Balcon* might be looked at in a similar light, in which the momentum of direct conflict is replaced by the playing out of fantasies in a world of simulacra. Fantasies absorb and disarm the action of the revolutionaries on the outside, as well as that of the police, the chief of which has privileged access to, and a strange familiarity with, the brothel; finally Roger castrates himself, while the Chief achieves the simulacrum of the simulacrum, and is entombed. Although there is a strong unity of action in *Le Balcon*, Pierre Laforgue has pointed out that, while in the 1956 version the sounding of the trumpets signalled the return to order, in the 1962 version the uprising has not entirely been put down, and we hear a burst of machine gun fire in the distance after the stage lights have been dimmed.¹⁸¹ This would imply that the revolutionaries are still active, and the action not at an end, placing it outside of the determinism of fate.

In order to analyse the unity of action further we will have to go back to Aristotle's *Poetics* in which he seeks to identify the whole of an action as single and continuous:

A whole is that which has a beginning a middle and an end. A beginning is that which does not follow necessarily from anything else, but some second thing naturally exists or occurs after it. Conversely, an end is that which does itself naturally follow from something else, either necessarily or in general, but there is nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself comes after something else, and some other thing comes after it. Well

¹⁸⁰ Arthur Schnitzler, 'Round Dance', *Round Dance and Other Plays*, trans. J.M.Q Davies (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁸¹ Pierre Laforgue, 'Les corps glorieux dans *Miracle de la rose*' given at the conference *Rituels de l'exhibition*, at Paris III, 9-10 February, 2007.

constructed plots should therefore not begin or end at any arbitrary point, but should employ the stated forms.¹⁸²

This means that Aristotle's idea of action envisages a single and isolated antecedent for each event that will break into conflict, resulting in an isolated ending point; in short, for him action has a dialectical structure. This is in contrast to the multiplicity one finds in, for example, the Dostoevskian world. There may be topological determinations for people finding one another along the same trajectory, or in the same space; but drama also springs from the arena of a multiplicity of action, as for example that in which Alyosha, Smerdyakov and, in *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin are caught.

There are indeed various ways in which the dialectical nature of drama has been contested, notably with regard to Hegel's insistence that the archi-structure of drama is one consisting of three acts. (*Aesth*, pp.1169-70) Dramas in five acts, he argues, display this same tri-partite structure: "exposition falls into the first, the three intervening ones detail the quarrels and reactions, complications, and struggles of the opposing parties, and finally the fifth alone brings the collision to a complete conclusion." (p.1170) The refusal to be drawn into this structure is to expose aesthetic determination in narratives and their rules of intelligibility.¹⁸³ The drama of existence can be portrayed otherwise, in two acts (*En attendant Godot*), in four (*Le soulier de satin*), or in a return to the *tableau* instead of the act as in Genet's theatre.¹⁸⁴ As Levinas explains, "le Moi est [...] drame en plusieurs actes" (*Tel*, p.258, *Telb*, p.314); and not three or five, one presumes. Genet's admiration for the equivocal nature of *The Brothers*, as well as for the coda to *Don Giovanni* in which the dead rise again and embrace (*ND*, p.206), shows his

¹⁸² Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450b 2.

¹⁸³ Guénoun, *Actions et acteurs*, p.73.

¹⁸⁴ Sarrazac remarks the distaste of Lukács for tableaux "qui y voit justement la décadence, c'est-à-dire la fin de la collision et du mouvement dramatique au sens hégélien: « on obtient les tableaux qui n'ont pas plus de liens entre eux que les tableaux accrochés dans un musée ». Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, *Jeux de rêve et autres détours* (Paris: Circé, 2004), p.38.

interest in resistance to the dialectical laws of three that we have found in Hegel and Aristotle. We will look now at examples in Dostoevsky and Shakespeare.

In *The Brothers*, Zossima describes his infancy and young life at the scene of his deathbed, a scene which occupies the beginning of the second volume. After the prophecy given before his death, that the Russian people is a Godbearing people and that the best is yet to come, and given that the law of three had been respected (birth-life-death), one would have thought that his earthly journey would have been complete. But no, his burial will impose difficulty and doubt upon the meek flock. Instead of dying and remaining incorrupt, his reputation amongst the inhabitants of the town, and in the heart of Alyosha, as well, is tainted, as each imputes the stench of his body to its former occupant and considers this to be his legacy, losing sight of his announcement of a prophetic future in the disappointment at being deprived of a cheap miracle. This outcome is revealingly referred to as his “conduct” by Madame Kokhlakov in a letter to Rakitin (*BK*, p.401, Book III, Chapter 3), who feels, having been the most avid believer, that miracles are no longer to be expected. Genet places the importance of this episode far above the parallel event of a continuation beyond death in ‘The Wedding at Caana’ (Chapter 4), in which Alyosha has a vision of Zossima joining the wedding guests at the feast.¹⁸⁵ Genet even goes so far as to change the order in the story, heightening incongruity by describing this religious experience as coming between Alyosha leaving the cell, and him going to see Groushenka, rather than following this visit. He also claims the religious experience was something Alyosha had claimed for himself, rather than an event reported by the narrator. (*ED*, p.214) If Zossima’s intervention in the family quarrel had been successful, and had the reading of his life story by Alyosha been corroborated by a sacred incorruptibility, then that would have defused the unity of action, and sent it in the direction of resolution rather than dissolution. But this is not the case,

¹⁸⁵ In Genet’s telling, chapters three and four of this book have been inverted. “Il prétend même avoir été visité à ce moment-là, et il finit, avec son froc de moine, dans l’appartement de Grouchegnka.” (*ED*, p.214) But, as Eddé points out, Genet made other slips in his recollections of Dostoevsky, including the mention of Sonia as a character in *The Brothers Karamazov* rather than *Crime and Punishment*. Dominique Eddé, *Le Crime de Jean Genet*, p.42; *ED*, p.166.

implying at once the strength of fate in drama, and the multiplicity of possible side routes and turnings, changes of pace, and distractions in the surrounding action. These could keep the hero away from Thebes, in the case of Oedipus, and away from Chermashnya and at home, in the case of Ivan, where he could prevent the murder of his father. (BK, p.713)

In fact, it is possible to conceive of the fatality of drama regressively, as was pointed out by Nietzsche with reference to Wagner: as starting from the ending and working backwards. Having quoted Aristotle against the illogicality of forcing the action to a predetermined end point, Aristotle's wish to isolate the action can be seen in another way itself as threatening the primacy of its logical unfurling, in that all kinds of valencies of experience must be cut out for *mimesis praxeos* to cooperate with unity of action, or as Guénoun summarises the construction of drama, the "mutation des *pragmata* (les faits) en *dramata* (les actions dramatiques)." ¹⁸⁶ In this context, an actual fact may not qualify as an intelligible act in the progression of a plot, but nevertheless remain vital, as all kinds of simultaneous events are possible which are not for all that extraneous, of which Dostoevsky managed to include more than, perhaps, any writer.

Poe too has interesting things to say on the matter of the logic of determinism in the novel generally in 'The Philosophy of Composition', a text that would so influence Valéry in his 'Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci'. ¹⁸⁷ There Poe relates how he guessed the ending to *Barnaby Rudge* in a correspondence with Dickens, before the final instalments had been published. ¹⁸⁸ Looking at his later essay 'Charles Dickens', he attributes certain problems in that novel to the author becoming distracted during the periodical publication from an original intended ending, leading, instead, to a second one. ¹⁸⁹ This indicates that

¹⁸⁶ Guénoun, *Actions et acteurs*, p.93.

¹⁸⁷ Lois Davis Vines, *Valéry and Poe: A Literary Legacy* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p.192.

¹⁸⁸ Poe, 'Charles Dickens', *Edgar Allen Poe Poems and Essays* (London: Dent, 1977), p.208.

¹⁸⁹ *Edgar Allen Poe Poems and Essays*, p.205, 206, 208.

the requirements of logic changed during the book's composition as the original ending became excluded by already integrated events.

In Poe's 'The Philosophy of Composition', another interesting matter for our argument comes to light, which is the use of theatre metaphors to describe the process of novel composition. The reader is deliberately excluded from this process of composition, which would unsettle them by challenging the impression of a writer being in control of every aspect of the illusion created:

Most writers [...] would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought – at the true purposes seized only at the last moment – at the innumerable glimpses of the idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view – at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable – at the wheels and pinions – the tackle for scene-shifting – the step-ladders and demon-traps – the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrion*.¹⁹⁰

All this has to take place before the novel can admit a reading public. This would suggest that the planning that has to be done by the artist is immense, in order to create a terrain in which the conclusion must follow logically from a vast array of possibilities. These possibilities, as Valéry explains in 'Introduction à la méthode de Léonard de Vinci', puzzle the individual in his or her own interior drama:

Intérieurement, il y a un drame. Drame, aventures, agitations, tous les mots de cette espèce peuvent s'employer, pourvu qu'ils soient plusieurs et se corrigent l'un par l'autre. [...] Ces lambeaux nous forcent à les interroger. Ils nous font deviner par quelles bizarres introductions des événements humains et des sensations continuelles, après quelles immenses minutes de langueur se sont montrées à des hommes les ombres de leurs œuvres

¹⁹⁰ Edgar Allen Poe *Poems and Essays*, p.165.

futures, les fantômes qui précèdent. [...] il suffit d'observer quelqu'un qui se croit seul et s'abandonne; qui *recule* devant une idée; qui la *saisit*; qui nie, sourit ou se contracte, et mime l'étrange situation de sa propre diversité. (*VOI*, p.1158)

This means that the individual, like the artist before a future work, is inhabited by multiplicity. The finished quality of a work requires the organisation of multiplicity into a determination, but to what extent can those phantoms that precede it and are cast in front of it be determined? Are they not cast by the undecidability of what is going to happen?

Guénoun draws our attention to Georges Forestier's explication that Racine's plays were written regressively; that Racine too wrote towards an already predetermined end point.¹⁹¹ Levinas remarks of tragic determinism in 'La Réalité et son ombre' that it involves the audience attending an event that will always unfurl in the same way. (*RO*, p.121) In that light, the Hegelian division of art into the plastic and the temporal, which meets its zenith in the theatre, does not change the fixity of the image. (*RO*, p.120; *Aesth*, p.1181, 1188) Quoting from the *Aesthetics*: "The actor should be, as it were, the instrument on which the author plays, or the sponge that can absorb any colour and give it back unchanged." (*Aesth*, p.1188) This unaltered transfer could not be further from the actor-witness in Levinas who discovers the Saying in their own speech. Guénoun resumes the playwright's difficulty of giving the impression of freedom between characters: "[l]a dramatisation consiste à construire des dilemmes, devant lesquels chaque agent est libre, dramatiquement libre, mais dont l'auteur sait l'issue."¹⁹² In this sense, the ending transcendently precedes the characters, leaving the characters no choice but to follow paths in a single direction.¹⁹³ Dostoevsky, by making Zossima act after his death, gives him a stronger role than that of Polyneices in Sophocles' *Antigone*, whose stench plays into the fatality of the action and not

¹⁹¹ Guénoun, *Actions et acteurs*, p.99.

¹⁹² *Actions et acteurs*, p.99.

¹⁹³ *Actions et acteurs*, p.100.

against it, as any transcendence must be searched for outside the bounds of the dialectical law of threes. We would venture further that the Aristotelean-Hegelian determination meets another, that of Heidegger's being-towards-death, a production, or coming to fruition in the projectivity of *Vollbringen*, whose presentation is highly dramatic, but which is, it too, a determinism, the production of an outcome.

Hamlet is an example of a play in which action has been slowed down into passion, in which agents have become patients, to such an extent that the event of the decision in the *dran* has become an indecision. As Nietzsche comments, Hamlet is both the spectator and the inhibited actor of the action in which he participates.¹⁹⁴ The action is de-dramatised, and comes almost to a halt, before Hamlet, who seems to have delayed all plans of taking revenge, agrees instead to fence for a bet. (V.2) That which is played, or "se joue", is his relation to his own action. In the same way, Shakespeare takes Coriolanus, the soldier and man of action, and makes him a politician, so as to interrupt his relationship to action on behalf of the *polis*. Determinism remains, only it is presented in slow motion.

There are different ways of ironising or testing the strength of the laws of determinism hemmed in by death. Zossima dies and strangely continues in the role of agent in the story beyond death. Shakespeare's Hamlet hesitates on the nearside of death, and Lear does too, having given up his decision-making role as king. It is disconcerting that Genet could speak of a freedom in genius, such as that shown by Shakespeare in *Lear*, as a discovery of laughter, as this is not a play known primarily for provoking mirth. He is referring to a state in which "après avoir eu du talent et du génie, ils connaissent autre chose de plus rare: ils savent rire de leur génie." (*ED*, p.216) Here the law of three is unable to exert its haste: Lear is unable after his *anagnonisis*, his recognition of his relationship to "unaccommodated man", to die. (III.4) He does not want to return to power, and addresses Cordelia, "Come, let's away to prison:/ We two alone will sing like

¹⁹⁴ "[T]he Dionysian man resembles Hamlet: both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action [...]." (*Boft*, p.60, Part 7)

birds i' the cage:/[...] and hear poor rogues/ Talk of court news" (V.3); only at the very end does Gloucester comment that, "he hates him much/ That would upon the rack of this tough world/ Stretch him out longer." (*Ibid.*) The action rather than speeding to an end is slowed down to a terminal degree. In a similar way, Genet uses the medical term ankylosis, a siezing up or ossification of the joints, to describe Decimo's slowing steps towards death in 'Fragments', examined in the previous chapter. (*Frag*, p.71) This slowing down and seizing up is a pathos which describes the frontier to a new literary form. Genet continues in his essay on *The Brothers*, from which we have already quoted:

L'œuvre d'art construite sur de seules affirmations jamais contrariées est une imposture qui cache quelque chose de plus important. (*ED*, p.216)

Lear, who, as Jann Kott puts it, has fallen off the stage on which the player struts and frets (described by Macbeth), still addresses other characters as though they were part of it, until a story that was a history, become a tragedy, is then read as a comedy, with Lear learning the clown's language. It is in this that the predicament of the tragic hero is expressed, that is in "tragic scenes shown through clowning".¹⁹⁵

In an, until recently, unpublished essay treating similar themes, Genet explains that such an artist gifted with laughter – adding to Hals, Mozart, and Shakespeare discussed in the Dostoevsky essay, Manet, Racine, Goya, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Nerval, and Proust – "ouvre une brèche [...]. Il la referme sur lui-même." ('À propos de Manet', *Cat*, p.289) This breaching, which is also a broaching of the *faux-semblant*, is, as has been said of Giacometti, unbearable. This is not in the manner of tragedy, but in the way the subject is made passively to withstand an alterity-content carried by a new form, which allows an alterity to perform a "mise en moi de son idée." (*Tel*, XV, *Telb*, p.12) This makes the subject the space for that which inhabits no space. Such a crossing enables, as Levinas writes at the end of 'La signification et le sens', the trace to figure as "l'insertion

¹⁹⁵ Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, p.166, 168, 149.

de l'espace dans le temps". (*HdH*, p.67) This finding in the trace of that which cannot otherwise take place complicates the subject's decision-making, such that he or she cannot come to a decision, a sharing out or a breaking down of what it complicates. This is a *non-lieu*, whose claim the subject cannot merely *throw out of court*, as the French term would suggest, because of insufficient evidence, but which commands engagement, and does this by interfering with our positioning of ourselves. The subject pursues meaning in the trace, which is impenetrable, and fails to unveil or reintegrate itself into the existing codes of the world. (*Ibid.*) Working from this breach or retreat the artist produces works which deny, however briefly, access to the world and its illusions:

L'œuvre sortie d'eux-mêmes, semble être née comme ceci: dans une aire géographique une époque s'interroge. Elle voit arriver, venant vite, à la rapidité de la marée montante, le mensonge, le faux-semblant et avec eux l'ankylose. Elle doit réagir. Pas de temps à perdre [...].

Il semble donc qu'une époque sente et même voit venir l'ankylose, elle dépêche quelqu'un d'assez robuste pour dire la vérité, la nudité du roi par exemple. La vérité est dite. L'inquiétude se dissipe. Un autre mensonge se prépare ailleurs [...]. (*Cat*, p.289)

If a society sends the artist on ahead, then the ankylosis of the loss of control of one's destiny in the ascendancy of the impenetrable over the communicable is being preceded by the ankylosis of the art object. Artistic ankylosis is therefore an aesthetic way of battling determinism in the world, as it works by inducing controlled passivity. Genet's characters are above all those that are unable to act, as they are ontologically overexposed. We think of those characters who are unable to take part in revolutions: Saïd the traitor, the clients of the Grand Balcon, Diouf in his role as apologist for historical usury, the maids unable to conceive of a life without Madame, Lefranc in his derisory sovereignty, and the inmates in *Le Bagne*, all lacking purchase beyond their confinement in ontological prisons. But is intensifying their confinement the only way of drawing attention to

determinism, through exercises in aesthetic determinism, or are such exercises, on the contrary, also part of tragedy? Or to express this question differently, is the beginning of a new dedramatised form of addressing determinism nevertheless subsumed into tragedy and its closed view of fate?

3. The continuation of the tragic spirit

Hegel was the one to conceptualise tragedy as a poietic rendering of State affirmed by the tragic individual. This can also be read in terms of the unity of action, as the community, the carrier of fate, is confronted by a contradiction in ruling principles embodied by the tragic hero, who is then reabsorbed.

The relationship between the individual and the community is drawn in Hegel and Nietzsche, respectively, through Spirit and Will, each of which describes their connection to the universal, and functions as an aesthetic-metaphysical theory, rather than a commentary on human affairs in the *mimesis praxeos*. (Tam, p.151)

In Nietzsche, tragedy's birth takes place from the choir, said to have been spawned from the hypnotic power of the poet Archilochus. These origins, Nietzsche tells us, should not be read in the light of a political reading of tragedy, derived from Aristotle through oppositions between the prince and the people, the chorus and the stage; for here, the choir is considered alone, and in a purely religious-metaphysical sense. (BofT, Chapter 7, p.56) The result of this is an alteration of our view of the theatrical, *theor-etical* space, by which that which is given to visual contemplation, through the Greek *theoria*, is no longer beheld, *theasthai*, by a critical community. As Taminiaux explains:

Il suffit qu'au moment de la naissance, déjà promue au rang de fondement, la tragédie soit réduite à un choral religieux pour que, dans sa version

achevée – chœur, scène, gradins – , « l'ensemble de la sphère politico-sociale » [*BofT*, p.56] soit mis hors jeu. (*Tam*, p.154; *NdT*, p.66)

The Will is the only qualified spectator and actor in the fabric of being itself, while music, rather than presenting a copy of praxis, as in Aristotle, presents instead a copy of the Will. (*Tam*, p.141) In line with 'The Greek State' dedicated to Cosima Wagner (1871-72), Nietzsche writes in the Preface to *The Birth* "that art represents the highest task and truly metaphysical activity of this life". (Preface, *BofT*, pp.31-32) There is a form of redemption associated with Nietzsche's artistic view of existence, which has its origins in Schopenhauer. Redemption in Schopenhauer is operated by a disengagement from the voracity of the individual will's tendencies, impulses, and yearnings.¹⁹⁶ So whereas in Schopenhauer, art, as with asceticism, achieves a distance from the will to live, in Nietzsche, on the other hand, it is the will itself, as Taminiaux puts it, which 'confirms and affirms' artistic activity. (*Tam*, p.134, 143, 145) This expresses itself through the Apollonian, the individuated, and the Dionysian, the destruction of individuality.

So if the chorus is considered as a religious entity, which is both creator and spectator of the events it enacts, then, for Taminiaux, it follows on from the *theoria-poiesis* coupling (thinker-technician) described by Hegel; only this time with regard to the production of will rather than spirit. This creator-spectator (*Tam*, p.152) recalls the spectator-actor we found earlier in 'La signification et le sens', who is individuated, but also as an individual feels itself acted upon in every phenomenon with which it is confronted, and through which at the same time it is produced or produces itself (*se produit*). One important difference remains, however, in that the spectator-actor does not enter into the ecstatic alienation about which we were warned in discussing 'La Réalité et son ombre'. (*RO*, p.112) Going back to the 'Notes' to *The Birth* from Winter 1869-70, we find that Nietzsche wanted to leach both spectator and actor of all implication in

¹⁹⁶ "[Q]ue l'on s'arrache aux tendances, aux pulsions et aux convoitises de son individualité singulière". (*Tam*, p.134)

praxis. For this reason drama was put to one side in favour of tragedy and its pathos playing on the will. He diminishes the role of Aristotle's *mimesis praxeos*, through which the public could study the consequences of action, in favour of a metaphysical experience of pathos in relation to the will. We continue quoting Nietzsche in the Michel Haar edition used by Taminiaux:

La fin émouvant, *phobos* et *eleos* n'ont rien du tout à faire avec le drame: ils appartiennent à la tragédie, mais *non pas* en tant qu'elle est drame. Toute histoire peut comporter ses éléments: mais surtout le lyrisme musical. (*NdT*, p.194; *Tam*, p.153)

Fear and pity are considered only in so far as they form part of the will, forming a metaphysical-musical response, rather than a reasoned, practical one even in response to the imitation of *mimesis praxeos*. From this position in the 'Notes' to *The Birth*, Nietzsche wants to test the impact of tragedy upon drama, which is what he does in *The Birth* itself and *The Case of Wagner*. Thus drama comes to be considered not as action but as event into which the spectator enters and is acted upon through the will, exposing the subject's decision-making apparatus, yet without the drama being played out in mimesis of societal interaction. This is the point at which Levinas begins to make use of Nietzsche's thought on drama, as drama which engages the will does not offer the individual an escape route from the portrayed events, implying not a climax followed by the spectator's exit from the theatre, but engagement in "the legend of the place", a kind of foundational activity. (*CW*, p.174) It is instead, as Nancy argues, a 'staging of the decision', which can be considered as a response to Nietzsche's event of high pathos, a "happening" rather than a "doing", in which the spectator-actor participates. This means the individual is implicated in the whole and the whole in the individual. We read, later on the same page of the 'Notes', Nietzsche's ecstatic version of drama:

Tout art désire un « être hors de soi », une extase; de là provient le passage au drame, en ce que nous ne faisons *pas* retour en nous, mais pénétrons dans un être étranger, dans notre extase; en ce que nous nous comportons en ensorcelés. D'où le profond étonnement au spectacle du drame: le sol vacille, ainsi que la croyance en l'indissolubilité de l'individualité. (*NdT*, p.194)

This quotation relates to the two extremes of Levinas's oeuvre: in which, on the one hand, a warning is issued about extase and *ensorcelement* in being or "être étranger", while on the other hand, each spectator is at the same time astonished at finding that their individuality is not indissoluble, leaving them porous and prone. Thus "être étranger" can be understood as either a sinking into being, or as a claim exercised by the Other, who disturbs the spectator in his or her position of separation by either joining him or her there, or enabling the subject to recognise the moment when he or she has lost distinction from others temporarily in the choral, or the collective. While the former creates participation, the latter creates recurrence, whereby through the "happening" a claim is made on the subject. If art desires that which is outside itself and in drama we do not return to ourselves, then it is possible that substitution has taken place whereby the self witnesses on behalf of the Other who has no voice outside the artwork.

In this sense, everything perceived in the drama of the individual can overfill the soul and lead to his or her 'going down' (*Untergang*), or descending into the world, to quote part four of the Prologue to *Zarathustra*, which is used in epigraph to 'Humanisme et an-archie'. (*HdH*, p.73) Levinas, therefore, is able to envisage the use of the notion of drama in Nietzsche not in pursuit of a metaphysics of will, but a metaphysics of ethics. There are other moments in these texts by Nietzsche that will be reworked by Levinas; for example, the points at which Nietzsche effects an explosion of the myth that reason and individuation are able to control the will. (*Tam*, p.133) This concurs with our argument in Chapter One on Rashkalkov, to the effect that in the possibility of erroneous readings introducing themselves into logical calculation, science may be the

plaything of the will. (*DVI*, p.40) Nietzsche, following Schopenhauer, criticises rational discourse as part of a “science intéressée”, a *theoria* subject to the will, (*Tam*, p.151), calling instead for “désintéressement” to be found in the purity of art. (p.135, 134) We also remember the peculiar and unpredictable switching between ‘disinterestedness’ and self-interestedness found in *Querelle de Brest*, examined at the end of Chapter Two. (*QU*, p.327) In each case, however, in common with the Schopenhauerian description of disinterested art, a watchfulness outside of the self is created which registers the inadequacy of the individual viewpoint, as signification is received outside any will to receive significance.

Before venturing onto a political reading of the stage and choir, we should first of all signal the difference between the poiesis of the Spirit in Hegel and that of the Will in Nietzsche. In Hegel the Spirit involves everyone, absorbing them teleologically into the *theoria* which will turn them from a *polis* into a *Sittlichkeit*, or ethical community. (*Tam*, pp.71-72) Nietzsche, in the precursor text to *The Birth*, ‘The Greek State’, presented to Cosima Wagner, expressed the belief that slaves should work not for the state but for the artist.¹⁹⁷ His discussion of will guided by art also therefore advocates poiesis. (*GE*, p.171) In the cases presented by both Nietzsche and Hegel, the construction involved in poiesis also involves destruction. This, it transpires, is the basic structure of the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*. Although poetry, understood in this way, as a perfected structure achieved with *savoir-faire*, is indeed poetical, Levinasian production, on the other hand, consists in a passivity which is not a participation in a poietic act of accomplishment, either of the spirit or of the will. Rather than being turned into a satyr carried out of himself, the member of the chorus might, as Genet puts it in ‘Comment jouer *Les Bonnes*’, see him or herself as they normally ‘do not dare’¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche, ‘The Greek State’, *The Nietzsche Reader*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large, trans. Carole Diethe (London: Blackwell, 2006).

¹⁹⁸ In ‘Comment jouer *Les Bonnes*’, “[...] je vais au théâtre afin de me voir, sur la scène (restitué en un seul personnage ou à l’aide d’un personnage multiple et sous forme de conte) tel que je ne saurais – ou n’oserais – me voir ou me rêver, et tel pourtant que je me sais être.” *GOC4*, p.269.

Genet tells Frechtman in a letter of 1960 that his conception of the theatre is exactly the same as Nietzsche's (*GTC*, p.943); but he qualifies this in the 1981 interview with Bourseiller and he explains that he believes neither in a moralising God, nor in Nietzsche's dithyrambic god of dance, but one experienced within the subject (*ED*, p.221). Furthermore, he refers in work notes taken at the time of the interview, in a strange mixture of the active and the passive, to being acted *through*, "j'agis tout le temps comme si j'étais agi par lui". (p.399 n.10) Seeing oneself at the theatre the way one knows one is, but would not dare to view or even dream oneself as being, is strangely parallel to the notion of being observed by God or a god who never takes his eyes off one of its creatures.

This enables the subject, both in the context of the theatre and of the drama of the individual, to see themselves passively, though actively absorbed in goals that remain potentially hidden. This is a passivity that includes a *me voici*, interrupting the complacency of knowledge and aesthetic enjoyment. This produces an *anagnoresis* or exterior recognition, which awakens the subject to what is secretly occurring in the innerlife of the Will or Spirit. For Levinas, it is therefore not the accomplishment of either Spirit or Will which is produced, but the subject's relationship to his or her own action in drama; a relationship is produced, rather than a specific poietic product.

Furthermore the *theoria-poiesis* (thinker-technician) coupling in Hegel describes the relation of the individual to the multitude in Spirit, and the state to religion, in the aspiration to absolute Spirit. This is far more at odds with Levinas's philosophy than are Nietzsche's ideas on poiesis in *The Birth*, which in spite of its attitude to construction and destruction also contains elements of the notions of drama and passivity that Levinas will flag in *The Case of Wagner* as worthy of emulation. I want to discuss this further now.

Taminiaux points out the significance of Hegel's early piece, *Jenenser Realphilosophie II* (1805-1806), as a foretaste of Hegel's maturity, and his

formulation of the absolute Spirit in the *Encyclopedia* (1816). He draws our attention to the speculative value of art for Hegel, which is at the same time interpreted in a sufficiently open way to keep it clear of particularities which could hinder its application to absolute Spirit. Taminiaux translates from the R-P Horstmann edition of the *Realphilosophie*:

« L'Esprit absolument libre, qui [a] repris au-dedans de soi ses déterminations, produit désormais un autre monde; un monde qui a la *figure* de soi-même; où son œuvre est accomplie au-dedans de soi, et où il accède à l'intuition de *soi* comme *soi*. » (*Tam*, p.70)

Taminiaux then comments:

[R]emarquons d'emblée que la caractérisation de la nature spéculative de l'Esprit absolu – c'est-à-dire son accès à l'intuition de soi comme soi dans un monde qu'il produit et auquel il confère la figure de soi-même – s'opère dans un langage à la fois suffisamment précis pour annoncer l'importance spéculative de l'art, et suffisamment large pour permettre à la pensée spéculative de fonctionner à la manière d'une esthétique alors même que son propos n'est pas strictement l'œuvre d'art. (*Ibid.*)

This speculative-aesthetic approach will, in the *Encyclopedia*, allow the classical beauty of art to become absolute religion, combining with Christianity to supersede it as absolute Spirit. This purified, synthetic teleology is opposed by the anti-synthetic approach of Genet and Levinas whose views on the sublation of alterity and the sublimation of feelings aroused by alterity are quite different.

The generalised aesthetic Hegel describes, and which serves to reconcile through theatre the singular and the universal in the Greek city state, had already begun to change form, Taminiaux argues, with the beginning of the modern state in the epoch of Plato. In *The Laws*, the only Platonic dialogue in which Socrates is absent, the Athenian stranger becomes the mouthpiece of Plato himself, it is argued by Taminiaux, and explains the exclusion of the player from the *polis* by

saying that the *bios theoretikos* is already a poet in his own right, and one that contributes to the composition of the whole of existence. (*Tam*, p.30) This position understands the theatre as the imitation of *praxis*, and *praxis* as failed poiesis. (*Ibid.*)¹⁹⁹ The modern state of Hegel, in its turn, requires a different poietic theory of the production of the individual in order to reach universal applicability. To summarize Taminiaux, this universal meaning is reached through Christianity, in which the spirit is reconciled with the world, in which everybody is the same in the eyes of God, and in which worldly events and nature are reconciled, leaving no discord, or unreconciled necessity without a representative self.

Both Genet and Levinas are sceptical, in their different ways, of this representativeness. For in this representativeness, the singular leads to the sacrifice of potential being to what is there, the “être-là”; while what is, is sacrificed to the advent of the spirit. (*Tam*, p.80) This structure is that of the modern state: isomorphic with its religion, in which nothing is accepted which is exterior to this fused structure. I want to examine further the implications of this sceptical approach to Hegel’s notions of drama and the state.

In Hegel, the state sacrifices the potential for *être-là* of those that compose it. But such a position cannot discount the fact these people are, nevertheless, beholden to animate the spiritual universality of the body of the state. The state will not die for the individual, but will ensure the survival of its absolute power through the death of the warrior. God, as the spirit of the community in the modern state, is ubiquitous, and this is stated by Hegel in the *Realphilosophie* in two ways: ‘the spirit of the community is the State of the Church’, or ‘the Church is the State raised in its thoughts’.²⁰⁰ This, then, is a synthesis of the Church and the State. But just as it is unclear as to whether Hegel’s is a philosophy of the

¹⁹⁹ Aristotle, on the other hand, deliberately replies that the poetic art is also a poiesis: “the correct way to construct plots if the composition [poiesis] is to be of high quality”. Aristotle, *Poetics*, (1447a 2-3) p.3.

²⁰⁰ We quote Taminiaux’s translation of the *Realphilosophie*: “C’est une seule et même chose de dire que « l’esprit de la communauté est l’État de l’Église » et de dire que « l’Église est l’État élevé dans les pensées ».” Jacques Taminiaux, *Naissance de la philosophie hégélienne de l’état, Commentaire et traduction de la Realphilosophie d’Iéna (1805-1806)*, (Paris: Payot, 1982), p.286, §284. *Tam*, p.80.

mind or of the spirit, it is also unclear as to whether such a synthesis is possible. This is especially apparent if one considers, as Levinas does, that religion is eschatological whereas universal history teleological. We are left wrestling with the paradox as to whether Hegel's is a philosophy of politics, or of religion.

If there has been an aestheticisation of ethical philosophy in Hegel, then religion serves as the route out of aesthetics through which intuition is abandoned in favour of the certainty of thought. (Tam, p.78) Art, Hegel argues in the *Realphilosophie*, does not have the same breadth of speculative possibilities as religion, for religion, more powerfully, creates reconciliation with the world, with the way the world is. Instead, art creates nostalgia for heaven and therefore pain. This returns us to the impenetrability of human experience pointed out by Bataille, a pain or discomfort which is attenuated through artistic expression, fulfilling, therefore, at the same time a religious function, as we discussed in Chapter One; a judgement that also, though in a different way, colours the thinking of Nietzsche. In Hegel, religion is thinking spirit, but which does not think itself, and is not equal to itself, and so is not immediate. This, however, will develop into knowledge, which is immediate. Religion then is mediate, refers to the exterior, and yet can free itself of content and return to immediacy. It is as immediacy that the Spirit knows itself. Spirit arises from immediacy as its own 'peaceful work of art – the *existent universe* and the *history of the world*'.²⁰¹ It is plain to see that a number of religious elements have gone awry in Hegel. The "futur utopique" that Levinas will attribute to religion (*DVI*, p.73), is instead attributed by Hegel to art as a peaceful, unmediated savouring of the present. The figure enters Hegel's system as a way of presenting the same in the other, such that recognition of the other is at the same time affirmation of the self.

This serves to argue that, in effect, the poesis of art in the *Sittlichkeit* is a teleological progression that goes past anxieties for the state to absolute

²⁰¹ Taminiaux's translation: "C'est en tant qu'imédiateté qu'est possible qu'est en général l'esprit qui se sait [...]. L'esprit est son œuvre d'art *paisible* – l'univers l'étant, et l'histoire du monde". Taminiaux, *Realphilosophie*, p.289, § 286-87; Tam, p.81.

knowledge. By coupling *theoria* and idea in art, *jouissance* is identified in the discovering of the same in the other, an outcome which Taminiaux expresses in Levinasian terms as the ‘negation of the imperious disturbance of the other’.²⁰² The Hegelian aesthetic schema, therefore, which comes from interaction with difference, then obliterates its own source by excluding the unmasterable, invisible, unnameable, surprise or enigma. Art is then made to serve the Idea as the surpassed past of spirit, behaving as an insulation, therefore, from the irruption of the other. That tragedy on the one hand and aestheticised Christianity on the other could be considered as passages to absolute spirit, serve to bring with them the anxiety that the peaceful contemplation of the art work might instead be a continuation of the tragic spirit, in which suffering is almost figureless, except in its brief incarnation by the tragic protagonist or by Christ.

Let us first consider the case of *Antigone*. In a modern Hegelian society, there is no room for each member of the collectivity to debate the decisions of the rulers. Their task is to carry out effectively, occupying particular roles, the tasks given them by the foreman. Personal, familial, romantic interests could be damaging to this unity of the ruled. This, Taminiaux speculates, seems to have been what attracted Hegel to founding the ethical essence of the family on the brother-sister relationship, as it is without desire, especially where a dead brother is concerned. (*Tam*, p.99) The conflict between Creon and Antigone, the representatives of divine-family law and human-state law, shows that ethical actions of the individual may be partial and therefore flawed. (*Aesth*, pp.1217-18) This leads to the dissolution of the tragic action we described above. (p.1163) Hegel has found in Christianity a way of ensuring the status of the individual after this dissolution; it is through Redemption, something through which every individual is absolutely valued. However, the valuing of an individual in so far as they are dead or caught in determinism is still to leave them to languish in being. This would make of religion a *mythologised politics*, a political reality which, as Lacoue-Labarthe puts it, is created from a *philosophy of tragedy, which is also a*

²⁰² “[U]ne véritable dénégation de l’impérieuse distance de l’autre.” (*Tam*, p.81)

poetics of tragedy.²⁰³ Hegel's is then a religion which is also a philosophy, and a poetics, and which places its value not in seeking to exceed being, but in the state of being itself.

How then does Genet's poetics compare to this deterministic philosophy of tragedy? His poetics, as Derrida explains in 'Signature', a revisiting of his Genet commentary in *Glas*, is at once an echo and a subversion of the Hegelian model. We will now discuss that ambivalence through Derrida's positions and counterpositions in *Glas*.

One of the chief features of *Glas* is the way in which the Genet column allows us to visualise the construction of absolute knowledge in the Hegel column. The white light of the sun characterises the superficial sense certainty of natural religion, and also its teleology in absolute knowledge. Both natural religion and absolute knowledge are an "absence de figure" in a "moment irréprésentable." (*Glas*, 264a)²⁰⁴ The certainty of the senses, like that of knowledge, is to that extent purged of the other who has now been discovered in the self; this is true of Hegelianism and also possible to construe in Aristotelean tragedy, as we have seen above. Figures do, however, operate in the second stage of the syllogism, in the religion of plants and animals, a stage into which, in *Glas*, Genet signs himself as both flower, *genêt*, and horse, *genet*. Something similar had already been related by Genet in 'L'Étrange mot d'...', when he describes the interactions of language as like both those of animals and plants: pollen, grafts, forests, beasts and migrations. (*EMD*, p.17) This erodes determinism, as the heliotropic flower or animate animal come to fill subject positions as instances of signature. Genet's identity as flower is animalised and gains a for-itself, something which correlates with our observations in the previous chapter, to the

²⁰³ I transliterate the following extract from an interview: "La philosophie de la tragédie est forcément une poétique de la tragédie", followed by a definition of religion as "de la politique mythologisée". Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'De Hölderlin à Marx: mythe, imitation, tragédie', *Labyrinthe, atelier interdisciplinaire*, 22 (Autumn 2005), 121-33 (p.133, 129).

²⁰⁴ This also brings to mind the Hölderlin poem 'Bread and wine' examined in Chapter One (our p.12), in which words are described as light, and which we now requote: "Long and hard is the word of this coming but / White (Light) is the moment." (*OWTL*, p.10)

effect that the trace can spread from the inanimate to the animate, which is more redolent of the face. A famous example by Genet, commented upon in *Glas*, is the passage from *Journal du voleur* in which Genet sees himself as the broom flowers (genista), and so acts by auto-figuration, or auto-production of the self, as he cannot be certain he is not the king, the fairy or the god of these flowers which carry his name. (*Glas*, 17a; *JV*, p.46-47) Through its accompanying signatures this enables Genet, from a starting point of illegitimacy, to occupy all roles himself in a sort of divine independence; to be his own father, mother and offspring; and to be on the point of reaching from natural religion, which carries but one figure, that of himself, to the threshold between absolute knowledge and absolute religion:

Cependant la filiation divine dont s'affecte le genêt, c'est une conception immaculée, permettant au fils de prendre – donc de laisser – toutes les places, de coucher seul – avec ici le père en soi, là la mère effective (*ansichseiende Vater und nur eine wirkliche Mutter, mais nur eine* c'est le meilleur) comme dans la *religion absolue*, c'est-à-dire au seuil (représentatif) du savoir absolu où le glas revient enfin auprès de soi, résonne, se réfléchit pour soi, admire sa gloire et s'égale à lui-même. (122b)

This would seem at first to be a solipsistic conclusion and yet it announces a position which is that of neither of the Hegelian suns – neither that of natural religion, nor the one of reason.

The figures are not, as in Hegel, consumed by white light, apprehended only in “une consommation de la figure”. (264a) Instead of being consumed, the figures fragment and multiply. The single figure is not Genet's only position; just as the text functions without the archi-signature of the writer, its contents, flora, fauna, human, non-human, can also signify as nouns and pro-nouns. This offers an alternative, carrying on past the light of absolute knowledge, and yet this alternative has yet to emerge as an alternative, as it is described by Derrida using the *Phenomenology* with a choice of quotations which evoke apocalyptic burning

in ‘holocaust’; the light of absolute knowledge producing “streams of fire destructive of [all] structured form”. (*Glas*, 265a; *PS*, p.419) We now continue quoting the relevant passage of the *Phenomenology* using A.V. Miller’s translation, adding in square brackets Derrida’s use of the Hyppolite translation for key terms: “light disperses [*dissémine*] its unitary nature into an infinity of forms, and offers itself up as a sacrifice [*holocaust*] to being-for-itself”. (*Glas*, 268a, *PS*, p.420)²⁰⁵ Here, holocaust is a sacrifice of disseminated meanings made for the self-determination of the for-self. This sacrifice of possible meaning calls in its turn for a kind of self-sacrifice, as the subject is implicated in a movement reminiscent of freedom in Levinas, which is a finite freedom; paradoxically, a freedom to be constrained by responsibility, in which the trauma of the impact of the other “ne me heurte pas seulement, mais m’exalte et m’élève et, au sens littéral du terme, m’inspire.” (*AQE*, p.160, *AQEb*, p.198) So, from a position of certain sense which has become immediate knowledge in absolute knowledge, we are brought back to the need of interpretation once again, as the white light of absolute religion shows the objects of natural religion, once more – that is to say flora and fauna in a diverse ethical landscape. What was “une consummation de la figure entre deux soleils”, becomes instead its reappearance in a similar way to the trace. (*Glas*, 264a)

The use of the terms ‘burning’ and ‘holocaust’ do not, as Critchley writes, seem felicitous.²⁰⁶ As Agamben comments, “Holocaust” is a term describing sacrifice whose application post-war designates the scandal of death, but in a terminology adapted from the religious life of one of its chief victims.²⁰⁷ However, Derrida’s reconstrual of Hegel is not intended to be politically neutral since his emphasis is upon describing the loss of alterity voiced in the implied death of the other. Derrida’s then is a holocaust which is almost synonymous with the remnant, the remnant being born of a responsibility pre-dating the subject of

²⁰⁵ Hegel, *La Phénoménologie de l’esprit*, 2 Vols, trans. Jean Hyppolite (Paris: Aubier, 1941), II, pp.215-16.

²⁰⁶ Simon Critchley, ‘A Commentary Upon Derrida’s Reading of Hegel in *Glas*’, in *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), p.221.

²⁰⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2000), Chapter 1.10, pp.28-31.

which the subject can never be rid, whose burning is in some way permanent. Thus the subject's freedom is preceded by a responsibility it will not be able to shoulder. (*AQE*, p.160, *AQEb*, p.198; *OB*, p.124) Indeed, Derrida hinges his observation on a quasi-metaphorical alternative to the complete destruction of holocaust: "holos" "caustus", that which has been entirely burned. He thus draws our attention to dissemination possible through a particular treatment of Hegel. (269a) This alternative involves a multiplication of figures put at the disposition of the subject:

Alors au lieu de tout brûler on commence à aimer les fleurs. La religion des fleurs suit la religion du soleil. (268a)

This availability brings with it a responsibility in the treatment of the trace. Earlier in the text, Genet "s'est fait une fleur" (20b), in the sense of both rendering himself a flower, and offering himself a flower. He is, therefore, not the sole beneficiary, he is instead an object offered to itself which is also discoverable by the other. As Jane Marie Todd describes, this transforms the signature from origin – that is source, sun and non-figure – instead into a proper name, the proper name of a flower: and thereby also proper noun into common noun.²⁰⁸ We now quote Derrida's explanation:

[I]l a mis en terre, en très grande pompe, mais aussi comme une fleur, en sonnant le glas, son nom propre, les noms de droit commun, le langage, la vérité, le sens, la littérature, la rhétorique et si possible le reste. (20b)

'Glas', as knell, can produce a resurgence of "le reste", that is the remnant or remains. This is why Genet as disseminating flower (referred to as "l'accent circonflexe", meaning "Genêt", 203b) starts off as his own parent, or mother (122b). Later, the flower becomes a kind of sister (273a), responsible like

²⁰⁸ Jane Marie Todd, 'Autobiography and the Case of the Signature: Reading Derrida's *Glas*, *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 38, 1 (Winter, 1986), 1-19 <[http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0010-4124\(198624\)38%3A1%3C1%3AAATCOT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0010-4124(198624)38%3A1%3C1%3AAATCOT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Z)> (p.7) [accessed 25 January 2008].

Antigone for burial of denied others – as Genet was responsible for Jean Decarnin and Décimo – in an unclearable debt to the remnant. So while one mode of production is auto-perpetuating, the other produces on behalf of the Other. This presents a route out of Hegel's philosophical metaphors, whereby the 'is' of being in general may function as an 'as', and present alternatives to an ontology of white light, of being uninhabited by beings; alternatives which replace an archi-metaphor with a whole variety of others, presented by the imagination, disordering and re-ordering what is.

The resurgence of the remnant takes place through traces in language, and yet Derrida has shown through his ambiguous expression of the remnant as *holocaust*, that the remnant may be situated in a position of both partial readability and of invisibility. This trace may be both readable and invisible like that which has become known under the proper noun of the Holocaust is the visible, readable proper noun of invisible proper nouns and their associated common nouns that have been consumed. It is a pro-name, and so refers to other names. And yet is this not too easy, to have one noun or kind of noun recall another? Would not Levinas, who condemns men-trees in Heidegger (*EN*, p.127), and men-animals in fable (*RO*, p.115), also be the first to condemn men-flowers in Genet? Does this not risk aesthetically circumscribing and bringing to presence events marked by a terrible loss and absence?

It is this kind of risk which led Adorno to state, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."²⁰⁹ This comment, resonant with the thinking in 'La Réalité et son ombre', implies that the aesthetic response may risk a perpetuation of barbarity more serious than any philistinism. What Derrida implies instead is a multiplication of meaning from an apparent unity, which is instead comprised of alterities. Thus for those born into a culture as mere inheritors of a geo-political situation there is a responsibility that persists in the remnant. This becomes part of a culture's pre-metaphysical coming to be that is given prior to ontological distinction. This giving in Heidegger is the *es gibt*, which in Levinas is reworked

²⁰⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), p.34.

in the trace. This, therefore, is not so much the remnant of what may be restored to being, but the remnant of the remnant. It is here that the remnants of unconsumed figures may interrupt absolute knowing. Being may be a gift, and a pure gift, but on achieving existential consistency, it must (*doit*) assume a for-itself, and it does so in the receiver. So even without transaction between the receiver and donor, pre-original responsibility arises which is not in the register of a simple return: “Je te donne – don pur, sans échange, sans retour – mais que je le veuille ou non, le don se garde et dès lors tu dois.” (*Glas*, 270a) The gift of the trace in being, therefore, reserves itself; and in the absence of donation and donor gives the subject a responsibility (*devoir*).

Derrida has taken a Hegelian-Heideggerian notion of being, and rerendered it, using Genet, such that the remnant, unthought and irreducible to the subject’s utility calculation, can behave like the trace. In a text not published until 1907, ‘The Spirit of Christianity’, written in Frankfurt between 1798 and 1800, Hegel attempts to found *Sittlichkeit* on a community sharing the universal love of Christ, who is offered in the host. This acts as a sublation of finitude and carries the individual to the superlatively beautiful idea of the universal to be found in the love of God. And yet this love, as Stuart Barnett points out, is not for the Other, for as Hegel writes: “In love man has found himself again in another.” (*SC*, p.278)²¹⁰ The attempt to reach the wholeness of divine love in the oneness of the community ultimately fails, for Hegel, because of Christianity’s will to autonomy and a separate destiny.

Still, the aesthetic aspects of Hegel’s description merit further analysis. In his treatment of the Last Supper, Hegel attempts to discern love as the expression of the feast, but in which “[l]ove is present only as an emotion, not as an image also.” (p.248) This offering leaves no remnant. The signified, love, is released into the world, while the signifier and referent disappear. Mary Magdalene understood that Christ’s love would continue after his death, whereas the disciples showed themselves to be attached to the signifier, both in their difficulty in believing in

²¹⁰ Stuart Barnett, ‘Eating my God’, *Hegel After Derrida*, p.143.

victory over death without Jesus' physical, living presence, and in their disapproval of the woman with the jar of perfume, who is a prostitute, but who, as Hegel comments, behaves like a *Jungfräulichkeit*. (Glas, 72a) When Mary Magdalene anoints Christ's feet, Jesus defends her from the disciples, "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a beautiful²¹¹ [good] work upon me./ [...] For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my sepulchre [burial]." (Matt 26. 10, 12) Derrida notes Hegel's attentiveness to this being the only moment in the story of Jesus that uses the aesthetic word "beautiful". (Glas, 73a; SC, p.243) This would mean that through an aesthetic moment, love could continue, but free from a physical remnant.

In the section of the *Phenomenology*, 'Religion in the Form of Art', Hegel describes the movement from the Spirit of Nature to self-conscious Spirit. This is thought in relation to art, as objectivity and intuition are made to complement one another. A person worships not a representation but "the Being of the risen Sun, [...] a Being which has now 'set' within itself". (PS, p.436) By being directly experienced and consumable, at least by the senses, as in the earlier 'Spirit of Christianity', immediate certainty within the self of the divine Being of the Cult is maintained as something that can be "seen, felt, smelt, tasted", serving as an object of desire. (p.437) The divine light that may be absorbed by fruit achieves self-consciousness and "now roams about as a crowd of frenzied females, the untamed revelry of Nature in self-conscious form." (pp.437-38) The frenzy of the Furies, just mentioned, or the stammer of the Dionysian, however, are too indiscriminate and wild to describe universal consciousness. Hegel writes, "the mystery of bread and wine, of Ceres and of Bacchus, [...] is not yet the mystery of flesh and blood." (p.438) To achieve this connection to flesh and blood, which evokes Communion, Hegel calls on the artist, and more particularly the actor, whose corporeal beauty should lead him to be decorated in the Cult in place of the statue, joining Bacchic enthusiasm with artistic clarity. This is, one remarks, strikingly similar to the Dionysian-Apollonian coupling in Nietzsche. And yet

²¹¹ καλον in Greek, translated as "good" in the King James version, is also translated "beautiful" in the sense of morally so.

here the hero becomes a “handsome warrior” (p.439), and in spite of the Christ-like parallels in representing universal human existence in the mysteries of bread and wine turned into flesh and blood, takes part in a celebration in which he is fêted, rather than sacrificed. This is done harmoniously and universally, as representation, in the loose equation between the aesthetic and the religious, which Taminiaux mentioned.

Nietzsche’s view of aesthetics is different, as he recognises the challenge of the impenetrability of the world to the Will, rather than its harmony in Spirit. The Dionysian-Apollonian coupling is reexpressed as the cruelty of nature, on the one hand, and the optimistic clarity of science and philosophy, on the other. In the last paragraphs to *Glas*, Derrida encapsulates the origin of literature as lying in “la ressemblance entre Dionysos et le Christ.” (*Glas*, 291a) In Hegel’s case, the unruliness of the Dionysian is synthesised with the perfection of the statue, in the actor-warrior, “an inspired and living work of art that matches strength with beauty”. (*PS*, p.438) This is neither the mere beauty of the statue, nor the enthusiasm of the Bacchic, but a reconciliation of the temporal and plastic modes in kenosis. Nietzsche also describes a relation between Christ and Dionysus, though in his writing the movement is more Dionysian and musical and also therefore destructive. For him Dionysian enthusiasm and Apollonian clarity are basic forces whose meeting and result, rather than offering themselves to a philosophical system, deny explanation. In a language which, like Hegel, also deliberately evokes Christian kenosis, he argues that the incarnation of gods and their sharing in being is the only way to justify the sacrificial logic of the life of man, and is therefore “the only satisfactory theodicy!” (*BofT*, p.43) So whereas Hegel tries to reconcile Spirit with the world through synthesis and assimilation, Nietzsche maintains a contradiction in the Will, and a scandalous quality to the suffering recorded. In the light of this argument from ‘Hellenism And Pessimism’, *The Birth*’s subtitle, Levinas will use his own ideas on production to critique both tragedy and the philosophy with which it shares a dialectical process.

4. Society of two and Society of one

In Chapter One, we examined the manner in which anachoresis, whilst being for-the-Other, can reject this as a burden and found its Ecclesiastical life instead on itself, or on the exclusion of a particular third party or group in denial of the Other. This would correspond to the two kinds of signature in Genet: one is a moment of reduction to figurations of the self in solipsism, in which everything is Genet, and in the other the same figures open into traces of the Other. The formulations of this hesitation in *The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov* play too major a role in our problematic for them not to retain our attention still further here. For those searching for an underlying metaphysical theory of being, the proximity of the *il y a* to illeity renders the attribution of meaning difficult, as they are each in different ways impenetrable. Since the demands of illeity may provoke the wish for a triumphant return to the self, in denial of the Other, the *il y a* that rushes in to take the place of illeity will receive particular scrutiny here in the role it plays in the ethical intrigue of the infinite.

We shall preface this argument with parallels and possible Symbolist sources for the *il y a*. As we discussed in Chapter One (p.58), the experience of the *il y a* is described by Levinas as requiring forgiveness regardless of any fault, in order for the bond to being to be even momentarily relieved by what is beyond it, or exterior to it. In *De l'évasion*, of 1935 (one of the precursor texts to the eventual formulation of the *il y a* in 1947), Levinas gives one of his earliest phenomenological descriptions of the saturation of being, and the need for transcendent exteriority, or “excendance”. (EV, p.98) Rolland develops Levinas’s reflections on nausea, through their nautical etymology, into a discussion of seasickness, in which the self cannot be evaded, because it is, as Levinas writes, “rivé à soi-même”. (p.116) Rolland writes in his preface to Levinas’s text:

La nausée doit ainsi être comprise comme le sentiment de notre être lorsque nous sommes en mer de telle sorte que, dans la dérive de la terre et la disparition de l'embarcation, la mer elle-même se retire comme mer et que nous demeurons seuls à flotter dans le pur élément. (p.35)

The description of errancy within a single substance, intensifying bondage, finds another very vivid formulation in Valéry's 1939 poem 'Sinistre', which describes a shipwreck:

Homme hideux, en qui le coeur chavire,
Ivrogne étrange égaré sur la mer
Dont la nausée attachée au navire
Arrache à l'âme un désir de l'enfer [...] (*VOI*, p.301)

The fact of being *rivé* to the vessel while at the same time being *dé-rivé*, far from any shore, spells the disaster of the poem's title; but the impression of imminent harm, or death, is traced not through an accomplished annihilation, but through the still more originary suffering of being. The impulse to seek escape through the other is given very unexpected expression by Valéry, whose rigorous thinking on the isolation of the Ego is usually consistent with atheism. It transpires that the last man on deck is Christ, who is not at the helm trying to 'save' the ship, but bound to the yardarm, turned at the will of the wind, suffering in pure passivity: "Je vois le Christ amarré sur la vergue!.../ Il danse à mort, sombrant avec les siens". (*Ibid.*) This highly unexpected image leads to a particularly dense conclusion, "*Son œil sanglant m'éclaire cet exergue: UN GRAND NAVIRE A PÉRI CORPS ET BIENS!*"

These lines possess the unusual quality of fulfilling the function of both final couplet (their actual position), and of epigraph (the position in which they are illuminated through a face-to-face). This adds an alpha and omega quality to the disaster that the poem evokes. Whether it is a past or present disaster, the speaker is progressively drawn in, making the subject viewpoint far from clear.

There is a sequential movement starting from viewing man and his achievements from the exterior – “Homme total” – to a sharing of the crisis with the subject – “L’abîme et moi formons une seule machine” – only then for the speaker to step back and view the bark in the reflection of the Other’s “œil sanglant”.²¹² The Other is glimpsed in the final moment of the ineffable experience of death, supplanting, it would seem, the speaker’s own crisis with that of a plurality. The arrival of the other’s demise in the consciousness of the speaker seems to bespeak a world, albeit in this case moribund, constituted through the other.

For his own part, rather than shattering against the barrier of nothingness, as in Heideggerian being-towards-death – something he would see as inducing not ‘a supreme lucidity’ or ‘supreme virility’, but “rendant impossible toute assumption de possibilité” (TA, p.57, 58) – Levinas discerns an originary bond to the Other perceived in a shared, though finite time for the moribund subject him or herself. Before the face-to-face with the Other on which Valéry’s poem ends, the obstacle of death is described in the fourth verse through a reference to time as the ultimate limit: “Le temps se brise ainsi qu’un instrument...”. One can read the irremissible into this, and a fast approaching end to the human register. The line might also recall *Revelations*, in which the Archangel states, “There shall be time no longer”. (10.6)²¹³ The slowing down of time before its destruction is

²¹² It is worth adding a word to Vines’s fine genetic work in *Poe and Valéry: a literary legacy*, which describes the influence of Poe’s *MS in a Bottle* on Valéry’s *Agathe*, whose original title was *Message trouvé dans une cervelle* (Vines, *Valéry and Poe*, p.64), whereby, internal to the subject, a form of recurrence occurs creating a spontaneous address within the self, as to a third party. As in *MS in a Bottle*, also describing a ship wreck, the addressee in *Sinistre* is not known. However, just as the initial promise to place the message in the bottle has been fulfilled, so the poem through its epigraph seems to spiral up from the whirlpool in the same way as the message in the bottle, each released at the last possible moment.

²¹³ Another description from *Revelations* includes the image of a thief: “If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee”. (*Revelations* 3.3) This verse is also noted by Genet in *Un captif amoureux* as a prefiguration of Christ’s coming, with which he contrasts his own trip to the Holy Land in 1984. (CA, p.236) There are two interesting moments, one in *Autrement qu’être* (AQE, p.189, AQEb p.232), the other in *De Dieu qui vient à l’idée*, in which the devastating arrival of the other is described as being like the entry of a burglar. We quote the latter example: the other “se glisse en moi comme un voleur, malgré les fils tendus de la conscience”. (DVI, p.123) It is possible in the continuity of saturation in being that the other, who may be our deliverance and possibility of forgiveness, may also add further demands, breaking into consciousness like a thief. (This would be especially true for Stavrogin, and for Zossima’s mysterious visitor, who feel compelled into a position of responsibility.) The wires layed for consciousness may be a reference to the Talmudic reading on

characteristic of the concentration of being in the *il y a*. Blanchot describes this concentration in *L'Espace littéraire*, with reference to suicide by hanging; as does Dostoevsky in *The Idiot*, through Myshkin's descriptions of the guillotine, and of an acquaintance reprieved before facing the firing squad. (*ID*, p.46-48, 86, 90-93)²¹⁴ For Levinas, the continuation of time demands a rerouting through the social, without which being is 'for-death', rather than 'for-the-other', since it is the other who endows the subject with time through forgiveness.²¹⁵

For his own part, Genet never uses such vocabulary. His description in the *avertissement* to *Le Balcon* disavows practical responsibility and instead turns its eye to the dramatic plight of the subject in being: "Si dans l'œuvre d'art le « bien » doit apparaître, c'est par la grâce des pouvoirs du chant, dont la vigueur, à elle seule, saura magnifier le mal exposé." (*GOC4*, p.35) This does not mean the bad for its own sake, but rather the figuring of the predicament of the subject. Any situation approached poietically as a problem to be solved may assume this quality of existing in a realm independent of its participants. Thus Genet criticises the intellectual playwright of the *pièce à thèse*:

ils chantent le Peuple, la Liberté, la Révolution, etc., qui, d'être chantés sont précipités puis cloués sur un ciel abstrait où ils figurent, déconfités et dégonflés, en de difformes constellations. Désincarnés, ils deviennent intouchables. (p.36)

'Refuge Towns', in which wrongdoers, or people who have accidentally hurt their neighbours, are relocated to protect them from the vengeance of their victims' families. In these towns, the sale of arms, traps, and wires is illegal, and upon decree neither warning nor protection from attacks is available. The quotation in *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* may then imply that the lines set to protect consciousness are bypassed, allowing the subject, nevertheless, to be reached in a pang of conscience, in a non-bloody strike. 'Les Villes-Refuges', *ADV*, p.51.

²¹⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p.127. Also see the section on the *scintilla dei* (the spark of God) in Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) Section 1.g, pp.69-70.

²¹⁵ Interestingly, Kirilov from *The Possessed* finds that the "time no longer" line, quoted to him by Stavrogin, affirms his intended philosophical suicide. (*PO*, p.243) He believes that through his own suicide he may demonstrate to man how to permanently escape his relationship to time, and therefore have no reason to fear death; that its phenomenological reduction is indeed possible, and that its accomplishment would carry man outside time, into a godlike state. This divinity would be an ultimate example of Bataille's confusion of dead sovereignty with saintliness discussed in Chapter One.

As they are “cloués sur un ciel abstrait”, not only can peoples’ fate not be changed, but they have become, we read next, “les signes constitutifs d’un poème, la poésie étant nostalgie”. (*Ibid.*) This nostalgia would arrest the time of that which is sung or celebrated, rather than incarnating it, thus “détruisant son prétexte, nos poètes tuent ce qu’ils vouaient faire vivre.” (*Ibid.*) This unusual evocation of Christian imagery identifies a continuation of tragedy, intolerable to the subject, through an arrest of temporality. Genet’s magnification of evil dramatizes this process, making it dramatic rather than poetic.

Seen in such a light, Levinas’s thought on the forgiveness of being is all the more clearly coupled with the effort involved in the accomplishment of the present and the subject’s continuation within time. The central component of time for Levinas is the effort involved in occupying and renewing the present, at once unchangeable and open to the subject’s hopes and initiatives. The presence of the present contains an “exigence” or demand for “le dénouement du nœud qui se noue en elle”, the present is both undone and recast, both part of the impermanence of time, engaged in absenting itself, and leaving something behind at every moment. (*DEE*, p.159) Levinas speaks, in evocatively Christian terms, of “la résurrection de l’irremplaçable instant”. (p.158) However, this description does not contain the particular kenosis, that is, the divine self-emptying of an identified Christ. If there is resurrection, it is one of non-thamaturgical continuation. (*Ibid.*) The hope of ‘resurrection’ does not take place through an intercourse of the soul with itself, but with the Other, which is also what is discovered by the speaker in ‘Sinistre’. (p.161)²¹⁶ It is for this very reason that Levinas identifies time as part of the problem of social relation and dialogue.

It would therefore follow that the events of ‘Sinistre’, which illustrate a solitary demise conjugated with that of others, fit Levinas’s description of time. There also seems to be a hint in the poem that the moribund quality of the instant may be followed by a resurrection, since “[a]u moment même où tout est perdu,

²¹⁶ In the priest’s discussion with Mme Emilie Teste’s he encourages her to continue to be patient, confident that on her husband’s arid island, there may one day appear a footprint. (*M.T.*, p.51)

tout est possible” (p.158), even though from epigraph to conclusion, destruction gains an ever firmer hold in the poem, and any transcendence remains outside of the bounds of the text. But as Levinas writes, “L’objet véritable de l’espoir, c’est le Messie ou le salut”. (p.156) This therefore would make of the messiah, rather than a *parousia* in appearance and presence, a futural movement. The coming of the Messiah for Levinas does not mean the end of time, as it does for Kirilov, but acts as a hinge, or in ‘Textes Messianiques’, “une charnière” between two different times. (DL, p.91) The Messiah may well not experience messianic time, which is brought forth through him, but looks forward to a time from which the Other may benefit. Hence, for Levinas, “sa mort dans l’intervalle vide aura été la condition d’une nouvelle naissance” (DEE, p.157), or as Dostoevsky puts it, quoting John, in the epigraph to *The Brothers Karamazov*, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” (John 12.24)

5. The One Church vs the Church of One

The appeal of messianic time in preparation of a future world should not burn the retina or enthrall the observer, as would an authoritarian or fascist messianism²¹⁷, but should be pursued through an attentiveness to the Other in justice and expiation. At the beginning of *The Brothers*, a dialogising question is asked in Zossima’s cell on the future of the Russian Church. An ecclesiastic has written a book which Ivan has half-jokingly countered with an article. The book claims that Christ’s is not a kingdom of this world, and that therefore the Church’s vocation is to evolve into part of the state. That is to accept the pursuit of power as its chief

²¹⁷ Rabbi Yehouchoua opposes the idea of free deliverance expressed by Rabbi Elièzer in the expectation that “Dieu va susciter un roi, un pouvoir politique, dont les lois seront dures comme celles de Haman et alors Israël fera pénitence et reviendra à Dieu.” Levinas continues, “Rabbi Yehouchoua répugnerait à l’idée d’une délivrance gratuite. Le phénomène Haman [the tyrant in the Book of Esther] (ou le phénomène Hitler) est situé dans la perspective du messianisme.” ‘Textes Messianiques’, DL, p.107.

aim. It is also to risk the idolatry of state Levinas identifies in ‘État d’Israël et religion d’Israël’. (*DL*, p.302) The Christ upon which such a state is founded would be one who had succumbed to the third temptation of the devil described in *Matthew* 4.1-11, accepting worldly power. Ivan argues that the historical vocation of the Church is quite the opposite. He argues that instead of the Church becoming a state or accepting a portion of it, “the church ought to contain the whole State”. (*BK*, p.67) This is further reiterated by Father Passy, who says that “every State on earth must eventually be entirely transformed into a Church and become nothing but a Church, renouncing those of its aims which are incompatible with the principles of the Church [...]”. (p.69) This powerfully evokes Hegel’s idea of Spirit as either the State of the Church or the Church of the State, where in fact there is no difference between the two, as we shall see in a moment. The Church for Russia of which Zossima speaks, in spite of attendant risks of Slavophile particularism, could be described as non-synthetic, as we shall go on to discuss. The Church of the Grand Inquisitor, on the other hand, is synthetic, associating peace with a people too weak to use freewill for an eschatology, and requiring instead a teleology related to the power and knowledge of a technocratic ruler. The spirit of such a state cannot survive subjective liberty of freewill in the *bios politikos*. As Hegel explains in *Lectures on Plato*, while there are different echelons of technician, the State is ‘the system of these systems’. (*Tam*, p.98)²¹⁸

Ivan’s argument will have to be further examined in the context of other sections of the novel, before its relevance to Genet and Levinas can be properly discerned in a comparison that is more than caricatural. `

In our current political climate, the will to transform the world into the one church would be highly reminiscent of different theocracies and fundamentalisms, which attribute sovereignty over life to themselves in the name of a particular

²¹⁸ “Chaque État est nécessairement un système de ces systèmes à l’intérieur de lui-même.” Hegel, *Leçons sur Platon 1825-1826*, trans. J-L. Vieillard-Baron (Paris: Aubier, 1976). p.129.

church.²¹⁹ Thus, under the guise of a monotheism, a pagan disqualification from membership of the justice system of a given Church may come about. This tends towards what in ‘The Grand Inquisitor’ poem is called the “world state” (*BK*, p.302), the agglomeration of political power into a totality. In Levinas’s thought since the 1930s, and especially in *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l’hitlérisme* and *De l’actualité de Maïmonides*, the basic form of monotheism is affirmed as a freedom from fate and destiny, which are associated with paganism, likely to result in moral relativism. (*PH*, p.12) Édouard Glissant is right to express his concern, as Bobby Seale of the Black Panthers does elsewhere, that a colonial monotheism pursuing homology may be equally pagan as the animisms it is keen to replace.²²⁰ As Howard Caygill argues, the contamination of Holy History by Universal or Profane History may allow an idolatry of state to establish itself invisibly.²²¹ However, as the least Russian of the brothers, Ivan’s ideas on the One Church are not unadulterated slavophilism, which saw Russian becoming in contradistinction to that of the West; in Ivan’s quandary Russian becoming is instead situated precisely on the dividing line between the combination of all states, churches and societies by ethics, and their agglomeration, as described in ‘The Grand Inquisitor’, by power.

If the transformation of the State into a Church can be understood in terms of a universal receptivity to the Other which is at the same time aware of the hidden tears of the Third, there is also the danger of a purely ideological religion, in which there are, as Zossima complains, “no more Churches left [...], but only clergymen and magnificent church buildings”. (*BK*, p.72) Dostoevsky, partially affiliated to the Slavophiles²²², concentrates the ire of many of his characters against the Roman Church, which Father Passy argues was simply absorbed into the pagan Roman state. Genet’s particular form of atheism favours a

²¹⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Labyrinthe*, p.128.

²²⁰ Édouard Glissant, ‘Les Empires qui se suivent et ne se répètent pas’, *La Cohée du Lamentin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005) p.161. Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time* (London: Arrow Books, 1970), p.283-84; Seale discusses single- and multi-headed godhead; discussed in Hadrien Laroche, *Le dernier Genet* (Paris: Seuil, 1997) p.166-68.

²²¹ Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.164-72.

²²² David I. Goldstein, *Dostoïvski et les Juifs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); *Dostoevsky and the Jews* (Austin, TX, London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.42.

generalisation of this suspicion of a pagan ecclesiasticism to being at the root of all organised religions:

Leur trait distinctif, c'est la Loi qui est la Loi, il n'y a pas d'explication, aucune raison n'est donnée: ce sont toutes des religions césariennes. (*AC*, p.119)

Levinas addresses such a position in 'État de David, État de César', in addressing the necessity of a state law which does not exclude the messianic character of moral law. (*ADV*, pp.209-220) In spite of Genet's problematisation of the "coup du calendrier" in 'L'Étrange mot d'...' in which a community posits itself as foundational, there are instances in which he remarks on the possibility of a surprising, perhaps authentic, religious trait, especially amongst the Black Panthers and Palestinians. Genet identifies this possibility less through the Marxism of these two groups, which he finds unrigorous (*CA*, p.62, 69, 125), than through the possible advent of a new order. He explains that "il est urgent de multiplier les « Avènements »" (*EMD*, p.10), so that new possibilities may *advenir*, or come to be: "Si le marxisme-léninisme est par autorité athée, des mouvements révolutionnaires comme les Panthères et les Palestiniens ne semblent pas l'être: mais leur but secret plus ou moins, c'est peut-être de lentement user Dieu, le rendre plat, exsangue, oublié, transparent, jusqu'à l'effacement total." (*CA*, p.62) This strange process of flattening out godhead would, for Genet, seem to involve a deontology of the ways others move within the trace of the Other; towards something futural, rather than nostalgic which in its support for a past order could risk turning the intangibility of Spirit into Mind, and functioning as a Hegelian synthesis.

A true Church genuinely concerned by its relation to the Other, Miusov comments, gives the improbable impression of an idealistic mixture of socialism and the Second Coming of Christ. He is quick to follow this up by posing a concrete problem that the Church would face were it to supersede the state: its understanding of the nature of crime and its punishment. Zossima's approach is of

great interest, "Crime and the idea of crime will undoubtedly have undergone a change [...]". (*BK*, p.70) Faced with the theistic Russian criminal, the church "does her best to preserve Christian communion with him: she admits him to Church services, to the holy sacrament, gives him alms and treats him more like an enslaved than a guilty person." (p.71) If and when the church takes the place of the state, on the other hand, it would be charged with the guilty man's sentencing, which would take the form of excommunication, the sending of men out of the company of men, which is nonetheless different from execution, which is merely the "cutting off [of] the infected limb". (p.70) The church's current welcome attempts to awaken in the criminal the consciousness of community, such that the damage to this bond in the loss of the company of men would register in the same way as excommunication. As Zossima comments, "This, strictly speaking, is so even now, but it is not officially so". (*Ibid.*) The bond to the Third may command, but it does not obligate, such that "our criminal today very often strikes a bargain with his conscience. "It's true I've stolen, but I'm not transgressing against the Church. I am no enemy of Christ'." (*Ibid.*) The continuing dissociation between society and Church would thus render it impossible to apply moral regulation rigorously.

Fedka, the convict in *The Possessed*, comes especially to mind; he attacks Peter Verkhovensky for doing something one might compare to performing a desecration with unwashed hands:

Now you see, sir, I have never made any bones about robbing them icons; but I jest took out the pearls, and how do you know, maybe my tear too, was at that moment turned into a pearl in the furnace of the Most High for the trials I've suffered in this world, seeing as how I'm just an orphan child what has no proper place or refuge. (*PO*, p.577)

So, if there is a slight pang of conscience, it can only be in relation to the Church which forgives and not the state.²²³ The idolatry of the criminal we find in Genet's novels is therefore, in part, an adaptation of this Dostoevskian idea in which, rather than the criminal claiming not to be an enemy of Christ, Christ Himself becomes identified with the criminal, perhaps even a criminal anointed for suffering and glory. This directs all eyes in *Miracle de la rose* towards the cell of the *condamné à mort*, as to a chapel, making theirs a "communauté mystique". (MR, p.300) While in *Haute surveillance*, as we observed in Chapter One, it is Yeux-Verts who carries the weight of the prison: the sacrificial idea of the felon is not interrupted, or even explicitly opposed by Genet. Instead, in both cases, the order of this sacrificial church is being placed above the state, as its crowning glory. (GTC, p.6)

This moral relativism and confusion may creep unknowingly into plans not only of rebellion, but even of principle. We take a secular example from Agamben: he discusses the bifurcation between judicial and moral guilt, in which a claim may be made to moral guilt but not legal guilt, or legal but not moral.²²⁴ Two moral escape routes are therefore perceived by the criminal. Either the criminal is the product of an unjust society, in which case "his crime is not a crime but only an act of rebellion against an unjustly oppressive force" (BK, p.72), involving no societal or religious guilt; or the criminal is guilty in relation to the Church, which dispenses forgiveness, but not in relation to society, which is not able or interested in rehabilitating the criminal. In his interview with Bourseiller, Genet offers numerous interpretations of the former position, notably that a certain class of criminal excludes him or herself from society. While in his interview with Fichte, he describes a lawyer encouraging a criminal to tell himself such a story. (ED, p.224, 163)

²²³ "The criminal today, therefore, is capable of recognising his guilt only towards the Church", that is, to the corner of the state without power, "and not towards the State." (BK, p.71)

²²⁴ Agamben, *Remnants*, Chapter 1.7, pp.21-24.

Zossima goes on to contextualise further the problem of the future life of the criminal. The church's claim is to honour responsibility to the Other and beyond to consider all others who form the Third. When the Church takes the place of the State responsibility will be generalised such that the criminal will find it more difficult to claim he is just, unless of course he altogether denies the authority of the Church on earth, and the claims of the Other that are imperfectly acknowledged therein. This denial can create impressive contortions in moral reasoning. "All are mistaken, all have deviated from the right path, and belong to the false Church. I alone, a thief and a murderer, am the Christian Church" (*Ibid.*): this would be an argument making the One Church a Church of One in the criminal. This Church should be understood as claiming to represent the Other, and in its declaration of infallibility, as erradicating the Third. This intermeshing of the church and society discovers a pagan view hidden within a monotheistic one. Genet, therefore, injects doubt into positions of monotheism in which the *axis mundi* is claimed not by the crucified, but by a criminal underworld made celestial:

La colonie, dont Divers, tournait autour de cet axe: Harcamone. Mais elle, dont Harcamone, tournait autour de cet axe: Divers. Puis autour de Villeroy et de beaucoup d'autres. *Son centre était partout.* (MR, p.362)

This at once establishes a kind of Church of One, interwoven with other Churches of One behaving as an alternative to anachoresis in a communion of punished criminals.

The affirmation of the self alone as the Church contains a vein of solipsism to which all organisations (and systems, structures, as well as individuals) are prone, that is that they are, as Levinas puts it, "à tout moment sur le point d'avoir leur centre de gravitation en eux-mêmes, de peser pour leur compte." (*AQE*, p.203, *AQEb*, p.248) The Anarchist network of which Peter Verkhovensky is a leader, for example, while being to some extent anarchistic is

shown to have an increasingly definite foundation; it founds itself on the elimination of any member who would attempt to disaffiliate himself, a process that will start with Shatov's murder. Just as individuals are kept in check by the other members, so the group as a whole is kept in check by the idea of other groups in the network observing them spread throughout Russia. Stavrogin informs Shatov that his life is in danger, and goes on to insist on the ideological power of the organisation, in spite of its limited membership. The fanaticism at its heart is not to be underestimated:

I'll even go so far as to say that, in my opinion, the whole society consists only of Peter Verkhovensky, and it's only his great modesty that makes him consider himself to be only an agent of his own society. (*PO*, p.250)

This method of rule would effectively impose upon others the recognition of a sovereignty which the group leaders can exploit whilst creating the illusion of it resting at some distance from themselves. As we saw in our discussion of derisory sovereignty in Chapter One, however, the isolation such a mode creates makes it costly for the perpetrator. Just as the Grand Inquisitor succumbs to the idol of power via the love and service of the poor, so it appears Peter Verkhovensky arrives at a similar view of power through an infatuation with Stavrogin who represents for several of the characters a messianic figure.²²⁵ Thus the an-archic link to the Good described by Levinas (*HdH*, p.88) is twice succeeded by the anarchic fear or mistrust of the Other.

This sovereign abuse allocates the power of the Church to itself, a power which was in fact intended to respond to a new beholdenness to the Other and to overcome the risk of parochialism limiting responsibility through self-interest. The problem this tendency causes for the messianic future of mankind receives considerable attention from Genet. Any progress to be made would have to be holistic and aware of the danger in which it places other others. This brings into

²²⁵ It is Stavrogin who inspired Shatov and Kirilov's attempt at cultivating a holy land in America.

close proximity our earlier discussion of sovereignty with our present discussion of the Church. Without the immortality of the soul, eternally held accountable for current behaviour, Ivan argues that there is no chance of a binding morality. He explains, “If there is no immortality of the soul, there is no virtue, which means that everything is permitted [...]”. (*BK*, p.92) But as Rakitin argues, albeit from a position that suits his careerism, virtue is also possible through simple concern for others: “Mankind will find in itself the strength to live for virtue even without believing in the immortality of the soul! It will find it in love for freedom, equality, fraternity...”, which form, of course, the triptych of modern French politics. (*Ibid.*)

Miusov’s above comparison of religion and socialism would form the basis of an eschatological politics, to which Levinas gives some attention, amongst other places, in his reading of Ernst Bloch, in whose thought the concentration of transcendent forces in culture – through successive artistic, critical, philosophical and technological advances put to the service of the human – does not require faith in the non-human. (*DVI*, p.63) Although Dostoevsky’s journalism was sometimes stridently Slavophile²²⁶, in his novels the extent to which faith is considered a necessity for political eschatology is unclear. Dostoevsky’s thought on the impact of belief on the Other, is, however, very sophisticated, and can be divided into two main arguments: one on atheism, the other on idolatry.

In a scene genetically anterior to the audience with Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Stavrogin, in *The Possessed*, visits the Bishop Tikhon to prepare his public confession of child abuse. The Bishop is untroubled by Stavrogin’s atheism and lends a critical ear to his confession on the grounds that, “A complete atheist stands on the last rung but one before absolute faith (he may or may not step higher) but an indifferent man has no longer any faith at all.” (*SC*, p.33) It is significant that, in *Totalité et infini*, Levinas repeats a very similar

²²⁶ Cf. Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, trans. Kenneth Lantz, 2 vols (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), II, ‘The Jewish Question’ (March, 1877) p.901, and ‘War. We Are Stronger Than the Others’ (April, 1877) p.929.

argument that independence is only possible in atheism through a non-enslavement to God, in the freedom to enjoy the fruits of economic life selfishly.²²⁷

Derrida issues a warning in *Glas* as to the kind of belief that may succeed atheism, as atheism forms one of the stages of the Hegelian System, which sublates into belief. (*Glas*, p.227ai) A related argument, clearly expressed in *The Adolescent*, is that atheism may, perhaps, not exist as such, but may instead conceal different kinds of idolatry, different forms of the discovery of the Same rather than the Other. We quote Makar Ivanovich in conversation with Arkady:

If he rejects God, he'll bow down to an idol – a wooden one, or a golden one, or a mental one. They're all idolatrous, not godless, that's how they should be understood. (*AD*, p.373)²²⁸

It is in this sense that the declaration in favour of freedom, equality and fraternity of the quite transparently unscrupulous Rakitin should be understood. He makes claims for the future self-sufficiency of the Third in a world in which everyone is provided for, but he is himself far from immune to the idolatry of power, whereby a sovereign position in abuse of *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* can be founded in

²²⁷ “La séparation s’accomplit positivement comme intériorité d’un être se référant à soi et se tenant de soi. Jusqu’à l’athéisme!” (*Tel*, p.275, *Telb*, p.333) Only from this separation is ethics possible, through the opening of interiority (*Ibid.*, p.276, *Ibidb*, p.334). For this reason we find unconvincing Diane Oenning Thompson’s distinction with regard to Dostoevsky between the thaumaturgic Christ of the Gospels and the merely human vulnerable Jesus of the Grand Inquisitor poem. The human Christ of the Grand Inquisitor poem cannot be subsumed to the context of nineteenth-century socialist renderings of Christianity. Neither belief, nor the supernatural take precedence in Dostoevsky’s novels over complex descriptions of interactions with alterity. Diane Oenning Thompson, ‘Problems of the biblical word in Dostoevsky’s poetics’, *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, ed. George Pattison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.69-101

²²⁸ This argument would be true of the Grand Inquisitor, who claims to be with ‘him’, the devil, rather than ‘Him’, God. There is an interesting exchange when Alyosha exclaims that the Grand Inquisitor does not believe in God, with which Ivan appears to agree. Though, in a partly analogue scene between Makar Ivanovich and Arkady, a lay brother of a technocratic disposition, fascinated by science and learning, delays taking his final vows. Arkady is even somewhat cavalier on the subject: “Quite simply, your Pyotr Valeryanych eats *kutya* in the monastery and bows, but doesn’t believe in God [...]”. (*AD*, p.357) Makar disagrees and explains instead that “his heart is uneasy [...] for such men seek God.” (*Ibid.*)

the name of these ideals, creating what Caygill calls in the context of Levinas's late essays on human rights "a parochial definition of fraternity as [...] class, nation, race or church"; once again a view of the Other only in view of the self,²²⁹ and simultaneously a way of dispensing with the problem of the Third.

In *The Possessed*, Shatov traces the evolution of the relationship between state and religion in order to determine the likely emergence not of a Church-state, but the possibility of the Church taking the place of the state, which we began by discussing in relation to the scene in Zossima's cell. Very schematically, according to Shatov: Judaism as the first monotheism worshipping the true God was succeeded by the religion of the Greeks, who deified nature and worshipped philosophy and art; their religion was in its turn succeeded by that of the Romans, who deified their people and worshipped the state for the better spread of their nation. The next example Shatov takes is that of France, which retained the embodiment of the Roman God in the people, but then rejected the people in revolution (1789), putting in its place a form of 'socialism'. (*PO*, p.255) Needless to say, even for the slavophile Shatov, these few lines are too cursory a look at the five millennia separating the origins of Judaism from the French Revolution. What is of particular interest to us, however, is the conclusion with its view of socialism and the way it is to come about, expressed in the astonishing phrase, "the abolition of the people". (*Ibid.*) This would be the abolition of the people by the people, beginning with the inclusion of the Third Estate and ending with the Terror, removing first rulers, then revolutionary rivals, then simply society rivals. However, the risk of the abolition of the people by the people in a certain kind of socialism, is for Shatov already "healthier than Catholicism" (*PO*, p.250) which, in the Slavophile doctrine, is already fatally contaminated by universal history in pursuit of power, rather than holy history in pursuit of ethics. Unlike Rakitin, who hopes to steer the triptych to his own advantage, Shatov longs that these values, which are at the same time beliefs in connectivity to the Other, will be understood

²²⁹ Caygill, *Levinas and the Political*, p.151.

as already associated with each other through the transcendence of the Greek Church, which will, he hopes, become the one church.

Hence Shatov is prepared for a disordering of the world which may lead to a more just reordering. The moment just after such reordering, Genet tells us, is politically the most delicate, as the social revolution needs to be explained, sharpened or completed – in the sense of counterpoised – by an artistic one (as we discussed in the previous chapter, p.160). It is as though the revolutionaries said:

“Nous allons prouver au régime que nous venons de renverser que nous sommes capables de faire aussi bien que lui.” Et alors, ils imitent les académismes, ils imitent la peinture officielle, l’architecture officielle, la musique officielle. (*ED*, p.152)

For Genet, Saint-Just presents a possible exception to this rule in his two speeches leading to the death sentence of Louis XVI. They employ eighteenth-century rhythm, syntax, grammar and style, but are new in their boldness:

Saint-Just dit dans la deuxième intervention pour l’exécution capitale de Louis XVI: si le roi a raison, il est le Souverain légitime, alors il faut tuer le peuple qui s’est révolté contre lui – ou bien le Souverain légitime c’est le peuple et le roi, c’est l’usurpateur, donc il faut tuer le roi. (pp.152-53)

This is not artistically new, as Genet says himself in the same interview. The liberty of the encyclopaedists and a certain violence of style, were already in place (p.148 and 152) but in the violent courtly language of Saint-Just, the cultural and political revolutions become indistinguishable for a moment, as one spurs the other. This Genet contrasts with Victor Hugo’s pride at the canon caste in his name during the 1871 Commune, by insisting that Hugo did not properly understand the Commune, and certainly did not develop as an artist as a result.

(p.153)²³⁰ So, since Genet approves of instability and worry as signs of life (p.240), it is no doubt these qualities which strike him in Saint-Just's oratory. Yet if Louis XVI ends as its first victim, Saint-Just himself is quick to follow, as he was himself 'abolished' in the name of the people.²³¹

Saint-Just's aesthetic expression, in its violence, may have had a beneficial effect on political deadlock, pointing out abuse of power. However, an entirely non-bloody use of such rhetoric is also possible, as Brecht demonstrates in his 1952 poem 'Die Lösung', or 'The Solution'. During a time of social unrest in the German Democratic Republic, the government expressed its disappointment with state workers, on near starvation wages, going on strike. Brecht counters that in that case, the only option that remains for the government is to dissolve the people and re-elect a new one.²³² Such a rejection of the people in the name of an eschatology for the people brings us back to the problem of a solipsistic church embodied in one person. Such a church, it should be remarked, would ironise Hegelian *Aufhebung* which we discussed earlier in this chapter, showing that its raising to self-consciousness is arrived at by dislodging and digesting alterity in the name of progress. Such a community undermines all confidence in the ability of this eschatology for the people to be what it claims to be: representative; raised from pure singularity to universal singularity. It seems likely Genet knew Brecht's adaptation of Saint-Just, since his attacks on Brecht occur in the same interview as his own quotation of Saint-Just. How, therefore, does he consider his own theatre to vary from that of Brecht? Their differences, at first, seem broadly to fall into the opposition between "dramatic" and "epic" theatre, between contrasting

²³⁰ It is worth emphasising the ontological value of the cultural object by means of a counter-example in Genet, which is the casting of the giant bell, 'La Savoyarde', hung in the Sacré Cœur, forged by the state to celebrate the falling of the second commune. *Le bleu de l'œil*, version 1, p.34c, consulted at IMEC, Caen.

²³¹ Genet applauds the poetic punishment of the Chinese Emperor, who after the Revolution, was made a gardener. He only regrets that this kind of turnabout in fortunes does not prevent escape, therefore making possible the dangerous resurgence of an individual's influence. (ED, pp.158-59)

²³² Bertolt Brecht, 'Die Lösung', 'The Solution', *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956*, eds John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 1976), p.440. The link with Saint-Just is somewhat strengthened if one remembers that Brecht was consistently engaging with French revolutionary themes at this period, especially in *Die Tage der Commune*, 1949. Brecht, 'The Days of the Commune', *Collected Plays*, ed. John Willett et al., 8 vols (London: Methuen, 1994-2003), VIII (2004).

engagements with illusion, on the one hand, and with critical lucidity on the other. However, one critic, Lucien Goldmann, describes Genet as “un très grand auteur réaliste”, and *Le Balcon* as “la première grande pièce brechtienne de la littérature française”²³³. Genet twice robustly rejects such an idea and combines it with acerbic criticism of Brechtianism. Let us examine these issues further.

First of all, the witness to an epic event, whose basic form Brecht describes in the archetypal “street scene”, is not internally implicated in the action, but instead stumbles across it.²³⁴ In spite of the concreteness of the “street scene” on which Brecht modeled his theatre, it was very probably of the Brechtian school that Genet was thinking when he described the suffering protagonist as nailed to an abstract sky in the prologue to *Le Balcon*, quoted above. (*GOC4*, p.36) In so doing he also accuses the Brechtian school of a certain romanticism in its use of functional symbols, in which one character is the people (e.g. Mother Courage), and another Capital (e.g. Creon in Brecht’s *Antigone*).²³⁵ While these symbols are situated in the drama’s events and are not essentializing, they do lack the nuance of interhuman relations found in theatre of the self. The difficulty being that while the non-implication of the audience in an “alienated” viewing or witnessing leaves theatregoers free to reflect, they do so in such a way that, in Sarrazac’s words, “la voix du questionnement domine la voix du fictionnement”.²³⁶ Though active, this questioning remains detached, unlike the staging of the decision proposed by Claire Nancy as a way of making sense of passivity and engagement in drama, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter. For his own part, Genet also protests, in the context of Brecht’s *Galileo Galilei*, that criticism from a position of alienation is facile, and moreover that it could equally be attempted in prose. (*ED*, p.145) Opposed to this alienated viewing is

²³³ Lucien Goldmann, ‘Une pièce réaliste: *Le Balcon* de Genet’, *Les Temps Modernes*, xv, no. 171, June 1960, p.1896.

²³⁴ Brecht, ‘La scène de la rue’, *Écrits sur le théâtre*, trans. Jean Tailleur et al. (Paris: L’Arche, 1963) pp.522-33.

²³⁵ See ‘The Antigone of Sophocles’, trans. David Constantine, *Collected Plays*, VIII (2004), and ‘Mother Courage and Her Children’ trans. John Willett, V (1995).

²³⁶ J.-P. Sarrazac, *Jeux de rêves et autres détours* (Paris: Circé, 2004), p.39.

the theatre of the ego in relation to the self, which is summarized in Nicolas Doutey's commentary on Sarrazac in terms of introducing a new kind of witness: "Dans le théâtre du moi [...] le témoin est témoin de lui-même; l'intrasubjectivité se substitue à l'intersubjectivité de la collision dramatique".²³⁷ Intrasubjectivity reveals the combat of man with, as Sarrazac puts it, "les forces invisibles, cosmiques, symboliques qui trament sa destinée".²³⁸ This serves to open up a critical distance even within the intimacy of the subject. The conflict that might otherwise form a Hegelian unity of action, responsible for the *Aufhebung* which metabolises the tragic hero, may instead function within the passivity of the spectator's own perception. It is for this reason that Genet's theatre is so opaque and so demanding on the faculties of perception, which are saturated, stripped bare and resaturated in illusion.

Genet asserts in the same interview that Brecht's theatre is too alienated, and even bourgeois; that one should not be able to smoke a cigar during the action, because this would mean one was more interested in one's cigar than in Mozart's *Requiem*, for example. (ED, pp.145-46) He cites, in opposition, Strindberg's theatre, which, he argues, would not be possible in prose, and which produces an experience which implicates the spectator. The example cited is of *Mademoiselle Julie*, traces of which can be found in *Les Bonnes*.²³⁹ These comments are later strengthened, to insist on the importance of the interior experience of the theatre. For if epic theatre may become overdetached, and the chorus in relation to the audience too distanced, then the importance of a theatre of the self, in dramatic relationship to the ego, is also neglected. The person witnessing him or herself, however, is in a position to observe the manner in which he or she is called to action. In this way, Nancy's "scène de la responsabilité" implicates the public in passive reception of the invisible forces of

²³⁷ Nicolas Doutey, 'Le regard et le présent: dramaturgies de la scène', *Critique*, 699-700, (August-Sept 2005), 627-37 (p.632).

²³⁸ Sarrazac, *Jeux de rêves*, p.38.

²³⁹ The cigar smoking comment refers to Brecht's wish that the audience at a Shakespeare play be allowed to smoke. Bertolt Brecht, 'Es gibt kein Grosstadttheater' *Werke: große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, Schriften zum Theater*, ed. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef, 30 vols (Frankfurt & Berlin: Müller Publishers, 1988-2000) XXI ll.34-38, p.134.

the environment. This internal drama of implication in the event is critically important.

In *Stavrogin's Confession*, Bishop Tikhon explains to Stavrogin the reception his confession is likely to receive from the public. He is curiously self-aware or even cynical, though also wild in his assertions. Its publication will necessarily result in the author losing control over its composition, in the same way that his act even within his own consciousness has come to revisit him in new ways. And yet, warns the Bishop, the reaction will be shared between the different publics' intrasubjectivity, as well as their intersubjectivity, creating highly contradictory reactions:

The horror will be universal and, of course more false than sincere. People fear only what directly threatens their personal interests. I am not talking about the pure souls: they will be horrified in themselves and will blame themselves, but no notice will be paid of them – besides they will keep silent. But the laughter will be universal.²⁴⁰ (SC, pp.77-78)

At the beginning and end of the quotation horror and laughter are noted as two colluding universals, in which the subject is exceeded by forces which surround it. This suggests that feelings of horror and responsibility, in an impulse towards the good, are restricted to intrasubjective life, in which the good are "horrified in themselves", but keep silent outside themselves. This is not Tikhon's final position on the matter, as he wants to send Stavrogin to the monk Zossima, a figure who will only be developed in Dostoevsky's final novel, in order to allow him to work on his anachoretic life. This connection between horror and laughter requires a reading of the apparent aporia in ethical relations in which Tikhon seems to read active responsibility as all but stifled, in which the bad feign horror, and the good who do feel guilt keep silent and do nothing. But according to Tikhon, they do not only hold their silence, since this laughter, being universal,

²⁴⁰ One has only to gauge the reaction of the press and public to allegations of paedophilia amongst celebrities to believe in the likelihood of such laughter.

must surely also emanate from their mouths. This could be explained by the trauma within the internal epic of the self. The staging of an event in which one is unable to intervene makes the staging of the decision in response difficult or impossible to calibrate. An event's scandalous qualities would do two things: attack one's belief in preordained fate by underlining one's part in that fate, and at the same time weaken one's belief in one's own agency. Lucidity and the possibility of intervention would require the non-intoxication by the transcendence of wrong. The internal epic of the self knocked away from the helm of preordained action would have to withstand the oppression of this lack of sense, within earshot of this laughter from others, until the moment at which the Other, as Levinas puts it, makes distraction impossible, and causes the laughter to 'stick in the throat'? (*DVI*, p.115) Stavrogin's encounter with the other is not expected by Tikhon to produce action or direct change, for Tikhon stresses the persistence of the wrong that has been done, both in the case of Stavrogin, who partially aestheticises his account, and of the public, who is unwilling or unable to sanction successfully against the repetition of this wrong. But for Genet, aesthetics is not expected to bring practical change in any case, operating instead at the intrasubjective level inside the subject. In his second attack on Brecht, this time in an interview with Michèle Manceaux (1970), he states:

Je crois que Brecht n'a rien fait pour le communisme, que la révolution n'a pas été provoquée par *Le Mariage de Figaro* de Beaumarchais. Que le plus une œuvre est proche de la perfection, plus elle se renferme sur elle-même. Pis que ça, elle suscite la nostalgie! (*ED*, p.62)

The hermeticism of the artwork is created in the traces it unites, and these are precisely what appeals to (or calls from within) the intrasubjective economy of the subject, and reproduces the moments at which it is interrupted by heterology. This produces a different quality of laughter from that which may be released when faced with horror, as we see in *Les Paravents* in which breaking down, breaking into tears, and breaking into laughter are all associated with each other. Another

kind of laughter is to be found in the anticipation of something beyond nonsense, but not beyond or after death, as in the ultimate example of *Les Paravents*, but situating the subject instead on the verge of discovery. In *Les Nègres* such anticipation is found beyond the disruptive high spirits of the laughter of political resistance, which first of all denounces injustice, but is also melded to the need for a reordering of human ties. In addition to its propensity for disruption, laughter may therefore also work to produce a reordering of our staging of reality.

If we take the Greek chorus's implication in the stage, on one level, and the individual's implication in what Claire Nancy refers to as the staging of each individual decision, on the intrasubjective level, each serves to create a meaningful interface with the world. Hegel's philosophical intention to close the chorus (viewing it as undermining the alignment of wills) and his opting to privilege the speculative space of the stage in its place, traces the rise of the *bios theoretikos*, a process which Nietzsche also points out in the eclipse of the Dionysian by the science of Socratic philosophy. Genet and Levinas comment explicitly on the dangers of such unbridled *bios theoretikos*, (*Tam*, p.7) but do so not from a position which examines the interactions of the chorus with the stage in *praxis*, but from a position of drama which looks at the staging of the individual. In this way they cross from chorus to stage, in a description of the spectator become actor.

But this staging of reality by the spectator-actor may opt for finding the self in the self rather than in the difficulty of the other. Thus it is clear that the spectator-actor involves not only the *polis* in the movement between chorus and stage, but the intrasubjective staging of the individual. The absorption of the tragic hero into the State, and away from his status as an exception to the rule of State, is carried out in Hegel by turning pure singularity into universal singularity and then, through Redemption, into Spirit. According to this process, every individual is absolutely valued, but only in so far as he or she is absolutely required in the form of a step in historical progress towards a teleological outcome. Religion understood as teleology rather than eschatology may be complicit to this process. There is a Nietzschean reading in *The Anti-Christ* which comes to mind in which

the question of faith is allowed to eclipse more important questions of action to which we shall now turn. On the few occasions Genet speaks theistically, he draws attention to responsibility for the time allotted him, “il semble donné par un dieu”, and to a kind of faith which he leaves vague, his “foi profonde, mais en quoi?” (*ED*, p.221, 27) In some recently published notes from 1972 Genet comments, “j’aimerais croire en Lui, un peu pour emmerder le monde.” (*Cat*, p.302) Here the question of faith and its effects on the believer are being indirectly addressed. Nietzsche traces through St Paul and Luther an abandonment of the Christian mission to live like Christ, because of its sheer difficulty. The rhetoric is strong: “there was really only one Christian, and he died on the cross.” (*AX*, p.35) He goes on to criticise the cooperation between Christianity and temporal power:

It is false to the point of absurdity to think that Christians are characterised by their ‘beliefs’, like a belief in salvation through Christ: only the *practice* of Christianity is really Christian, *living* like the man who died on the cross... (*Ibid.*)

In his reading of Nietzsche, Kaufmann refers in Luther to an “occasionally fierce deprecation of all moral effort, and [...] his doctrine of absolute obedience to the authorities of *this* world.”²⁴¹ He goes on to quote from Luther’s *Sämtliche Schriften*, that those “who have faith and know that their sins are borne by Christ are just.” Still speaking about Luther, Kaufmann points this out as a double standard, that

[f]aith takes the place of action: instead of perfecting oneself, one has faith that Christ was perfect – and meanwhile there is a Church that, instead of insisting that man leave father and mother and break with conformity,

²⁴¹ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, AntiChrist*, 4th edn (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), p.346.

insists that man conform to the Church in matters of faith and to the State in matters of action. (*Ibid.*)

We see therefore that there is a danger in religion itself that the sacrifice of a Hero-Redeemer may not be emulated, but instead be viewed, to re-evoked Hegel, as the ephemeral individuality of the tragic hero reabsorbed into the state; or worse still, as idealism providing camouflage for pragmatism. In some of Genet's recently published notes, thought to date from 1972, he views Christianity as a form of tribalism resorting to the use of emergency power, leading to the declaration of a state of exception, through which,

[l]'homme ou le peuple mettent dieu (et ces commandements) entre parenthèses, de la même façon que l'entreprise révolutionnaire met sa théorie entre paranthèses. (*Cat*, p.302)

This would mean that a certain kind of religion in its allergy to the Other would be a form of cynical pragmatism. Read in the context of Hegel, this would mean that absolute religion as a stage in the philosophy of Spirit had taken a turn towards *Realpolitik*, and had become more a philosophy of Mind, intrasubjectively monitoring hetero-affection and the claims of that which lies outside the self; ready to bracket away Christian tenets and ignore commandment. A sacrificial quality is introduced into thought, which echoes ironically its origins (as Hegel presents them) in Christ, in the Crucified; for the individual is peacefully forgotten, or rather remembered only aesthetically in the Spirit's work of art. The unease this process causes is only made acceptable by the impression, consistent with theodicy, of historical progress. *Pompes funèbres* is a fine example of a quasi-Hegelian *Aufhebung* in which a work of mourning or tribute becomes, in an atypical moment of justice under the Occupation, an act of perversion and forgetting.²⁴²

²⁴² Derrida suggests, "one of the oppositions between these two great Christians Hegel and Genet remains that between a Protestant, Hegel who believes that Reform has a privileged link with

In Hegel's *Phenomenology* the Family is charged with the task of the universal individuation of the defunct, such that an individual's "supreme 'work'" is to sacrifice their individuality and die for the community. In universal individuation, posthumous consciousness of self, affirmed through the family, replaces simple, natural death and assimilation into nature. (*PS*, p.270) Hegel continues:

Blood-relationship supplements, then, the abstract natural process by adding to it the movement of consciousness, interrupting the work of Nature and rescuing the blood-relation from destruction; or better, because destruction is necessary, the passage of the blood-relation into mere being, it takes on itself the act of destruction. Through this it comes about that the *dead*, the universal *being*, becomes a being that has returned into itself, a being-for-itself, or, the powerless simply isolated individual has been raised to universal individuality. (p.271)

This affirmation as universal individuality through the family is what Genet is able to offer Jean Decarnin in *Pompes funèbres*, even taking in part upon himself the act of destruction. For Hegel the interaction of family and state law is one of interdependence, but also one of hierarchy. For immediate individuation in the element of the family to become an element in ethical life, service must be done to the state. The State can call the individual to work in war:

In order not to let them become rooted and set in this isolation, thereby breaking up the whole and letting the [communal] spirit evaporate, government has from time to time to shake them to the core by war. By this means the government upsets their established order, and violates their

philosophy and absolute knowledge (many of Hegel's texts show that Protestantism makes thought possible, makes Hegelian thought possible), and on the other hand a perverse, very Catholic choirboy, very marked, as Genet himself says, by faith, by a faith initially carried by the Catholic catechism then freed from the catechism and especially from a theology that Genet holds to be more Protestant than Catholic. In other words he liberates himself more easily from Protestantism than from Catholicism." 'Countersignature', p.25.

right to independence, while the individuals who, absorbed in their own way of life, break loose from the whole and strive after the inviolable independence and security of the person, are made to feel in the task laid them their lord and master, death. (pp.272-73)

Decarnin was a *résistant* and a Marxist, and yet in fighting the enemies of the State he met death from a member of his own state, in the form of “une balle tirée par un Français.” (PF, p.17) In Hegel’s understanding of Greek tragedy, women are the representatives of the family and it is for them to occupy themselves with the individuation of the dead, as does Antigone. In *Pompes funèbres*, it is Genet, out of love for John, who occupies this feminine role of mourning on behalf of a diverse and accidentally constituted family: Juliette, who perhaps conceived her child by a Captain of the Militia (pp.39-40), and the collaborator mother and her SS companion, Erik, posthumous stepfather to Jean. Since in Genet the divide between family law and state law is not clear, the opening into universality is subverted. Genet’s corrupt family law as a law of betrayal, reverberates, therefore, within a corrupt State.

In the case of *Pompes funèbres* the enjoyment of individuality is soured by a traitorous family, while the enjoyment of the virtue of universal life is soured by a more general political instability in ethical codes. (PS, pp.276-77) In Hegel the conflict between family and state law seeks nevertheless their reconciliation in unconscious acts of commission or omission, whereby each has a view to reintegration into the whole. In this sense government is “the self-affirming individuality of the universal essence and the self-conscious will of all.” (p.277) The Spirit of the individual who has suffered wrong, rather than ceasing in death to exist, becomes instead an Erinyes or Fury, threatening from the netherworld, while the family continues his bloodline. Hegel refers to this interaction between individual, family and nation in being as a “stable equilibrium of all the parts”, in which each part is “a Spirit at home in this whole”. (*Ibid.*) Therefore, the individual’s conflict is not against the community but against death, and the forgetting involved in becoming a Thing in Nature; the individual is therefore in

conflict with “mere being”, making of tragedy a struggle within ontology. It is against being that the hero or heroine turns. The bloodline, on the other hand, prefers to read the conflict that has claimed their relative as “*a work deliberately done*”, so that the wrong should be something *willed* and performed by the community, and therefore be something which can be opposed, producing ethical significance and an ensuing history. (p.278, Hegel’s emphasis) Genet’s reading of such issues in *Pompes funèbres* would therefore remain bound within tragedy and an aestheticisation of the will.

In Hegel, this produces the strange cathartic logic in which the wrong is absorbed into being, but remains “something *willed* and thus something agreeable”; agreeable because expressive of singularity (p.278). The funeral rites given to the tragic hero, which in this Hegelian perspective should reconcile the individual with the ethical work of universal life, were actually used by Genet to his own advantage when drafting, with Sartre and Cocteau, his appeal against his sentence to life imprisonment. His tenth conviction, which would have meant “la rélévation”, was excused on the grounds that he had confessed to the crime committed by Decarnin only so that the war hero’s name “ne reçoive aucune tâche”.²⁴³ The pragmatic hypocrisy of the author of *Pompes funèbres* does not, for all that, diminish the complexity of the book’s exercises in mourning and memory. In fact, its impressive compression of contradictions with regard to relations of family and state behave as an anti-synthesis in which Spirit regurgitates rather than assimilates its constituent parts. The conflicts surrounding Jean Decarnin threaten to make him indigestible to the ethical community of the future state, a view which Genet uses to his own advantage in trying to secure his release. In this way, the *jouissance* of a tragic spectacle is not disturbed and singularity, at least outside Genet’s novel, is successfully reintegrated into a peaceful postwar Liberation narrative. This confirms a distance between Genet and Hegel, significant because it illuminates the irreducibility of singularity; at the same time, it follows the way in which the metabolisation, digestion and re-

²⁴³ Éric Marty, *Genet, post-scriptum* (Paris: Verdier, 2006), pp.114-15.

absorption of singularity may be aesthetically and rationally approved and accepted.

The sublation of an individual or group belonging only to the past, and in the past tense of a philosophical-historical development, may be used to derive pleasure, and thus confirm the identity of today's victors. The immediacy of knowledge can make spirit "its [philosophical knowledge's] peaceful work of art", as Hegel had shown in the earlier *Realphilosophie d'Iéna*. This serves to read selfhood as equal to itself, with knowledge and spirit contained one in the other, and requiring the exclusion of hetero-affection.²⁴⁴ Such a disposition can lead to ambiguity in the derivation of values, for as Levinas writes, "la légalité des choses" can become bonded to "leur égalité à nos désirs". (*DVI*, p.201) More worryingly still, therefore, the logic of equality with the self is further used in Hegel to derive an ethics. But, as Levinas writes in *Difficile Liberté*, this tendency and this danger long predate Hegel:

L'histoire de l'humanité, à travers religions, civilisations, États, guerres et révolutions, n'est que la pénétration – ou cette révélation – de la raison dans l'Être, bien avant que la pensée du philosophe n'en ait pris conscience en formulant le Système. (*DL*, p.329)

In the above piece, 'Hegel et les Juifs', Levinas criticises Bernard Bourgeois' uncomplicated lauding of Hegel's ambiguous and highly anti-Semitic Frankfurt writings (which include 'The Spirit of Christianity'). Levinas writes that Hegel is already aware that his views of the Jewish people conceive of them as members of a past contributing to a Christian present, in "un destin tragique que Hegel reconnaît". (p.331) In 1950, Claudel's post-war rewriting of the Bible, *Emmaüs*, also provokes Levinas's anxiety for, in common with readings of type and anti-type, it understands the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New Testament. For Levinas, man here becomes actor in a piece of theatre, functioning as a figure

²⁴⁴ Hegel, *Realphilosophie*, p.289, §287.

for a miraculous, sacred ‘beyond’ realized in the Christian itself, leading him to ask in protest, “La dignité spirituelle de ces humains et de ces femmes leur vient-elle d’un drame situé sur un plan miraculeux, dans un au-delà mythologique et sacré, plutôt que du sens que cette vie – qui est conscience – se donne à elle-même?” (p.173) He later asserts once again his opposition to any deterministic reading of the Bible in dramatic terms, and stresses again that “L’histoire Sainte n’est pas interprétation d’une pièce à thèse, fût-elle transcendante, mais l’articulation par la liberté humaine d’une vie réelle.” (*Ibid.*) Levinas grounds still more closely his anxiety in aesthetic preoccupations by speaking of “l’homme-figure”, and “l’homme statue” which he finds in Hegel; along with “la petrification de nos visages” by a “Dieu metteur en scène”. (p.174) This is a response to Hegel’s description of tragedy according to which “the Divine is the inmost objective truth lying in the external objectivity of the action”, and in which the “decision on the course and outcome of the complications arising from the action cannot lie in the hands of the single individuals who oppose one another, but only in those of the Divine itself, as a totality in itself.” (*Aesth*, pp.1162-63) Claudel’s exegesis and transliteration of the Old Testament therefore also risks performing a kind of racial transfiguration, serving to chase Judaism from the Old Testament as a relic religion, in spite of Claudel’s profound sympathy for the Jewish people following the Shoah. (*DL*, p.173) Instead of reading the unique origins inscribed in the Hebrew language, a retroactive loss occurs of the traces that produce meaning. Theodicy may even collaborate in this, whereby a “people deicide” can be blamed for their own demise. Levinas traces the development of such thought in the dangers of revisionism: “Caïn ne préfigure-t-il pas le Peuple Juif et Abel l’Agneau Immolé?”. (p.174)

Earlier in this chapter we discussed the epigraph to *The Brothers*, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth many fruit.” (p.229) We were seeking to discern something similar in Levinas, something he describes as the Good beyond being. And yet could this Biblical image not also refer to the threat of a sacrifice made necessary by the Hegelian unity of action, in which one death ensures another life? And would not

this acceptance of a necessary sequence be complicit with the logic of the apologist, for whom history is characterised by determinism? We have shown that the good beyond being is prone to becoming sealed in upon itself to the detriment of alterity. Genet and Levinas in different ways each point out the danger in Hegel of such a tendency becoming religious in character. In the next and final section of this chapter we will show the point at which Levinas and Genet address the determinism of Hegelian poesis; and show how each uses Nietzschean drama to reintroduce an ethics of responsibility.

6. *Aisthesis* and drama: two modalities of sacrifice

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche observes the dangers of *theoretical man's* ascendancy, holding science to be not only the prime method of cultural production, but also of cultural meaning. He criticises science's falsely optimistic belief in the moral perfectibility of human beings through the technical satisfaction of their needs, and identifies it as a gateway to supreme selfishness insofar as it allows the other's needs to be cast off out of preference for one's own. He asserts that tragedy and pessimism are rejected more out of theodicy, reconciling suffering with a beneficent God or the beneficent order we call progress – much in the manner, comments Levinas, of Job's friends²⁴⁵ – than any wish to contemplate the world realistically, or its pains in their non-integratable complexity.

To recapitulate, Nietzsche examines the benefits that were once gained from viewing the world figuratively and aesthetically with a kind of disinterestedness, rather than conceptually with the self-interest of science; and divides this aesthetic viewpoint into 'dream' and 'inebriation': respectively, the Apollonian and the Dionysian modes. The former represents the individual who has risen beyond suffering to dreamlike clarity, while the latter represents crossing

²⁴⁵ *BofT*, 'Attempt at a self-criticism', Section 1, p.18. Cf. also Levinas, 'Transcendence et Mal', *DVI*, p.199.

into plural anonymity in the inebriate enthusiasm of the bacchanalian whirl. Here we encounter concerns with Nietzschean aesthetics expressed by Levinas in ‘La Réalité et son ombre’ (1948), in which participation in the work of art leads to a Hegelian-sounding statufication of the character, which in its turn takes hold of the contemplator (*RO*, p.120); a situation in which, as Nietzsche himself puts it, man “is no longer artist; he has become a work of art”. (*BofT*, Ch1, p.37) As we have seen, throughout his oeuvre, Levinas reworks, sometimes openly, sometimes covertly, problems raised by aesthetics, and he seeks to describe the relationship of both art and knowledge to alterity: each seems to represent its own specific dangers, as it would appear that man may participate in his technological creations in the same way that he participates in the image, each being of ontological character, only to become lost in them. As Taminiaux tells us:

L’activité de poïesis n’a pas de fin en elle-même mais justement dans ce qu’elle produit. Elle est donc un moyen en vue de ce produit. Et ce produit, à son tour, est pour tel ou tel but, tel usage ou tel bien. Il en résulte, non seulement que cette activité se diversifie en fonction des nombreux produits qu’elle a pour buts, mais encore qu’elle risque de transformer tout désir, fût-il lié à une intelligence et métamorphosé par un choix délibératif, en quelque chose de futile et de vain parce qu’emporté dans un processus infini (*apeiron*). (*Tam*, p.61)

The ‘infinite process’ that poiesis commands in the technical universe takes over from the more general interactions of *praxis*, in which action is not attached or limited to a particular object, as in poiesis, or to an agent, as in *dran*. Thus *praxis* and the *eupraxia*²⁴⁶ of seeking to act or interact well (p.62), is succeeded by the will to act effectively. This creates the poiesis of state discussed above in Plato and Hegel, and in Nietzsche a poiesis of the artist as chief technician within the state.

²⁴⁶ Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K.Thomson, further rev. edn (London: Penguin, 2004), 6.5, 1140b, 5-6. p.150.

But to return to Nietzsche himself: he regards the first exponent of the optimistic self-possession and self-interest of the scientific mind as Socrates, who played a decisive role in the dampening of an already waning tragic tradition, leading to the remains of antique poetry being incorporated into the Platonic dialogue. (*BoFT*, p.90-91, Section 14) Whereas the spectator of tragedy sought to contemplate the suffering of an individual, as an exponent of “eternal suffering” (p.112, Chapter 18), Nietzsche contends that the scientific mind can tend towards a debased tragic sensibility which acts in such a way as to “confine the individual within a limited sphere of solvable problems”. (p.109, Chapter 17) Kaufmann, on the other hand, is careful to point out that Nietzsche’s position is shared between that of the tragic and the philosophical, and that it is from this contradiction that he derives the motor for his argument. In that way, the dialectic between the scientific optimism of Socrates and the artistic pessimism of ancient tragedy emerges as a necessary one, as they each work on the interpretation of an otherwise impenetrable world.²⁴⁷

In ‘De la connaissance à la veille’, Levinas comments on the risk that the transcendental illusion, which grasps phenomena only in their appearance, might create a reason entirely reliant on the order of being which produces it; such an outcome would throw the entire field of action into dangerous parallax:

Comme si la rationalité, c’est-à-dire, selon l’acception occidentale, l’absorption de la connaissance par l’être, était encore une griserie; comme si, toute dressée dans sa vigilance de lucide, la raison identifiant l’être dormait debout ou marchait en somnambule et encore rêvait; comme si, dans sa sobriété, elle cuvait encore quelque vin mystérieux. (*DVI*, pp.35-36)²⁴⁸

Levinas is evoking the illusory character of rational discourse, which through self-referentiality ceases to be sufficiently rational. While in Levinas, this awaits the

²⁴⁷ Cf. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, pp.392-93.

²⁴⁸ See also the dream description in *RO*, p.112.

sobering influence of the other, in Nietzsche's reading of theatre many of the practical, social, personological aspects of a play's reception that are applicable to everyday life are removed. For example, the attribution we have discussed of fear and pity not to drama²⁴⁹ understood as dialogue, but to the pathos and lyricism of tragedy instead, a sphere he presents as independent of the *mimesis praxeos*, because it is not yet societal in the sense of showing individualities able to interact, debate, and disagree with one another. Nietzsche's ontological understanding of tragedy does not therefore allow the disaffiliation made possible by *mesotes* – that half-determined quality of the human animal and its nature – requiring instead the completion characteristic of the tragic event. In Levinas, however, *phronesis*, practical wisdom, is retained in the effort of the subject engaged in a dramatic event to see clearly. In Nietzsche's 'Attempt at Self Criticism', the unreliability of science is examined through the lens of art, and then that of art through the lens of life. (*BoFT*, Section 2, p.19) Levinas's own critical use of Nietzsche describes the inability to see soberly or clearly as the result of intoxication by the rational apparatus of the world, which inebriates in the same way as wine; this is a none too oblique reference to Bacchus. It would be convenient if art were a straightforward means of "dégrisement" from which knowledge and the scientific spirit might benefit. Unfortunately, the mysterious wine of reason is only the first of what Nietzsche refers to as the "stimulants of culture". (Section 18, p.110) The second and third are "art's veil of beauty", taken generally, but also at its highest point: the "metaphysical comfort", or the consolation of tragedy. (Section 18, p.109) Levinas is therefore making more explicit Nietzsche's construal of poietic science as replacing the ecstatic experience of tragedy. This ominous development suggests that both science and tragedy solicit an anonymous, deterministic mode of participation.

The blurring between concept and aesthetics had already been underlined by Valéry in 'La soirée avec Monsieur Teste'. Teste's companion exclaims that he would love to see a theatre inspired by his meditations, to which Teste replies,

²⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a, p.21.

“Personne ne médite.” (*M.T.*, p.27) Valéry seems to imply that the mind participates in being in ways other than the rational. Levinas draws the conclusion that poetic art in its self-enclosed character might be able to mimic the other, who makes “ecstasy” possible, to return to a notion we remember from ‘De l’évasion’, quoted above. (*EV*, p.98) He also concludes that this might merely be a representation, and therefore not produce real alterity containing the possibility of substitution, just as the slave in *Le Balcon* creates a decoy focus of energy, absorbing Roger into the aesthetics or narrative of revolution, rather than its completion. (*GOC4*, pp.129-30) And so we read in a note to *Autrement qu’être* that the dia-chronic and non-contemporaneous are merely ‘imitated’ in art. (*AQE*, p.191, *AQEb*, p.235)²⁵⁰ In ‘Dieu et la philosophie’, furthermore, Levinas writes that in the presence of the Other, the aesthetic element of the ethical in artistic enjoyment is cut off. The intrigue of the infinite, or the divine comedy, is played out “dans l’ambiguïté du temple ou théâtre”, but is a comedy nonetheless, though one in which, to return to a quotation to which we have already alluded, “le rire vous reste dans la gorge à l’approche du prochain, c’est-à-dire de son visage ou de son délaissement.” (*DVI*, p.115) The divine comedy is therefore a kind of drama which follows the interruptions of what was previously determined. It is ambiguous because it belongs to two orders – a terrestrial order, and the order of an elsewhere; this opens the possibility of crossings between the ordinary world and the reality of the Other, without this being an ‘alternative reality’. This splicing of realities, rather than resulting in poetic enthusiasm, creates instead the very opposite effect, and acts so as to sober the subject on the approach of the other.

Yet is not tragedy an exception to this kind of “dégrisement”, in that both the *jouissance* and the meaning of the event are bound up in the completion of the tragic action, bringing us back to the unity of action in Hegel? This determinism and the poetic approval which condones it would mark the difference between the

²⁵⁰ “Par une subreption irrésistible, l’incomparable, le dia-chronique, le non-contemporain, par l’effet d’un schématisme trompeur et merveilleux, est « imité » par l’art qui est iconographie.” *AQE*, p.191, n. 21, *AQEb*, p.235, n.1.

“resorption” of the other by the subject²⁵¹ in the self-constitution of the *I think*, and substitution. Substitution is the point at which passivity is retracted in activity at the risk of pure loss to the subject. This pure loss may take place after the trauma of lost bearings in “l’excès ou l’é-cœurant remue-ménage et encombrement de l’il y a”. (*AQE*, p.209, *AQEb*, p.255) This disordering of situatedness and signification is not merely aesthetic, and is receptive to alterity. The trauma of the *il y a* is the effort of thinking, not that which “puzzles the will” in death (*Hamlet*, III.1) which would deprive the subject of everything, but through the interference of excess in the Other depriving the subject of its princely independence. However, in art there may be a disparity in primary content between sensation and the alterity it is meant to represent. Might not the aesthetic create a loss of bearings which is agreeable to the subject protecting it from loss of resources demanded by the Other?

In beauty, then, the other may be shrouded in poetic effect, supplanting him, and removing the subject’s initiative. In tragedy, the position of the Other in tragedy is still more ambivalent. Nietzsche identifies tragedy’s strange and uneasy nature in turning the fate of the tragic hero into an exercise in pathos and style. Goethe is quoted as noting the “lively pathological interest” (*BoT*, p.132, Chapter 22) that tragedy arouses; the stupefying experience in which “the deepest pathos” can, at the same time, be “aesthetic play” (pp.132-33), for actor, poet and spectator alike. (p.52, Chapter 5)

Nietzsche’s theory holds that in Greek tragedy the energy of this aesthetic participation is created by the playwright’s use of the chorus, which dynamically joins actor and spectator. The chorus occupies the *orkhestra* (originally the area for dancing), the shape of which is followed by the mounting concentric tiers of spectators who, for Nietzsche, drawn into the action, disregard or “*overlook* the whole of world culture” and feel themselves becoming part of the chorus, part of the ecstatic Dionysian rhythm. (p.63, Chapter 8) The work of Sophocles,

²⁵¹ “[...] se résorbe”, *AQEb*, p.164, *AQE*, p.132.

Nietzsche argues, has a decisive effect on the character of the theatre, removing the chorus from the *orkhestra* and placing it on stage. (p.92, Chapter 14) This change in the gradations between dramatic spectacle and its audience alters the kind of ecstatic participation produced. For Nietzsche, this trend towards the privileging of the stage is continued in Euripides, in whose work logic and continuity guarantee the pathos on the stage by means of the prologue and the ending, which are generally entrusted to a divinity who can assure us of the reality of the myth being represented. (pp.84-85, Chapter 12) And, as we have discussed above, the deployment of the stage as a conceptual space as required by Hegel began, according to Nietzsche, from Euripides onwards, as the audience is increasingly given to recognise a reality positioned before them, rather than being drawn into its constitution themselves. The conceptual disposition of consciousness, to requote from *De l'existence à l'existant*, allocates “le pouvoir de se trouver toujours derrière ce qui [lui] arrive”. (*DEE*, p.78) Here an act of mind creates the distancing effect. The passivity of the chorus of which the audience is a part forms a different kind of positioning opposite, however, one that is in a passivity akin to Levinasian substitution. Nietzsche describes a process in which the impact of the actor is increasingly removed from the audience, turning the passivity of the otherwise than being (which lies prior to the opposition between activity and passivity) instead into an aesthetic and conceptual act. This serves to prevent ethical substitution, whose disposition towards the other, rather than being initially an act, is instead the undergoing of a quandary on their behalf, followed by “l’ultime rétraction de la passivité”. (*AQE*, p.209, *AQEb*, p.255)

This flattening out of the three areas of the Greek theatre (stage, *orkhestra*, and audience) alters the multiplicity of points of view for which theatres “in the round” are known, and would seem to begin a trend towards the privileging of the image we know today, which makes of assignation in production, thematisation in essence.²⁵² The Bacchanally primed actor, as Nietzsche develops the idea, “sees

²⁵² See Denis Guénoun’s distinction between “une scène de jeu” and “une scène des images” (Guénoun’s emphasis), in ‘Grand témoin: Scènes et autres scènes’, *Mises en scènes du monde*:

the role he is to play quite palpably before his eyes”, like an image; and at the same time as the spectator’s sight becoming capable of “penetrating into the interior”. (*BofT*, p.63, Chapter 8; and p.130, Chapter 22) So for Nietzsche, however participatory the experience of tragedy may be, the ultimate wisdom of tragedy goes beyond the spectacle of a succession of scenes, or an illusion of omniscience. Its wisdom, for Nietzsche, lies instead in the “destruction of the visible world of mere appearance”. (p.140, Chapter 24) Thus for Nietzsche, rather than being a Heideggerian moment of *aletheia*, of unveiling being, the destruction of the world of appearance goes beyond the image of that which is on or behind the veil, without having to settle on that image. As Nietzsche says earlier in the text, “our consciousness of our own existence hardly differs from that which soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented on it.” (p.52, Chapter 5) While, on the one hand, this image is completely aesthetic, on the other it recognises image as a limit to understanding.

In the courtroom scene in *Notre-Dame*, Death descends on the proceedings as a piece of material occupied and surpassed by different images:

Ici, la mort n’est qu’une aile noire sans corps, une aile faite avec plusieurs coupons d’étamine noire soutenue par une mince carcasse en baleines de parapluie [...]. Cette aile d’étamine flottait sur le Palais que vous ne confondez avec aucun autre, car c’est le Palais de Justice. Elle l’enveloppait dans ses plis et, dans la salle, elle avait détaché pour La représenter une cravate de crêpe de Chine vert. Sur la table du Président, la cravate était la seule pièce à conviction. La Mort, visible ici, était une cravate, et j’aime qu’il en soit ainsi: c’était une Mort légère. (*ND*, p.177)

Through the arrival of Death in its one representative in the courtroom, the tie is said to be at risk of becoming erect and covering the proceedings with ridicule in

Colloque international de Rennes, 4-6 Nov 2004 (Dijon-Quetigny: Les Solitaires Intempestifs, 2005), p.202.

the form of dissemination: for *étamine* in French also means ‘stamen’, the male pollen-carrying part of the flower. (p.183) The piercing of the silk representing death will not, however, reveal anything behind it, and this penetration threatens to divest us of the images which illuminate charted thought: “Notre-Dame danse, au bord d’un gouffre hérissé de baïonnettes, une danse périlleuse.” (p.177) Other folds in this silk forming both foreground and background are flattened and taken back into impersonal being, as “les petites tantes de Blanche à Pigalle perdaient leur corolle, comme la fleur de papier que tient le danseur au bout de ses doigts et qui n’est plus, le ballet fini, qu’un tige de fer. Ne valait-il pas mieux qu’il dansât toute la danse avec un simple fil de fer?” (p.187) Within the courtroom, the crowd is worried by Divine, who is divested of this name and called instead to the witness stand by his original name, Louis Culafroy. This arrival at the edge of the world of appearances between *monde* and *demi-monde*, for Divine is also associated with an inner-change: “Divine sort de son drame intérieur, de ce noyau de tragique qu’elle porte en soi, et, pour la première fois de sa vie, est prise au sérieux dans la parade des humains.” (p.189) This adjournment of tragic fatality is rejected by the court, impatient for a sentence; such that kinship relations – “Il pourrait être mon fils” – can only be viewed as semantic miscarriage: “On annonçait qu’un déraillement mettait la Mort en retard.” (p.188, 190) Favourable witnesses, though not suppressed, are sidelined to the witness room, as though hidden in the wings of a theatre. Genet writes, “L’avocat général fit cesser la parade. Les témoins étaient ressortis par la porte entrebaillée. Chacun n’étant apparu qu’une seconde, ils brûlaient au passage: l’inconnu les escamotait.” (p.189)²⁵³ The contemplative space of the courtroom-theatre is fragmented, “Les véritables centres de vie étaient cette salle des témoins – Cour de miracles – et la chambre des délibérations”. (*Ibid.*) This separates the witnesses, the action, and the discussion of the impact of proceedings on the jurors. Interestingly, the public

²⁵³ Valéry describes a conversation between Degas and Clemenceau which may have impressed itself upon Genet: “Une autre fois, rencontrant encore Clemenceau à l’Opéra, il lui dit qu’il était allé le jour même à la Chambre: « Je ne pouvais, durant toute la séance, dit-il, détacher mes yeux de la petite porte de côté. Je me figurais toujours que le paysan du Danube allait entrer par là... – Voyons, Monsieur Degas, riposta Clemenceau, nous ne l’aurions pas laissé parler... ».” *DDD*, p.123.

who would in Greek theatre occupy the space filled by the chorus, behold the dramatic action taking place as illusion in a “Cour à miracles”, rather than through the mode of multiple viewpoint that should be encouraged when assessing responsibility. From the public’s midst, finally, a catalyst for the action is issued:

Enfin, le Président fit nommer l’expert aliéniste. C’est lui qui, vraiment, surgit par une trappe invisible d’une boîte invisible. Il était assis parmi le public, qui ne s’en doutait pas. (p.190)

Here, the reliable form of scientific evidence delivered with the prestige of a criminal psychologist, serves to dissolve definitively our bonds to the Saying in the Said of criminal science, “...Déséquilibre... semi-responsabilité... sécrétion... Freud... Jung... Adler... sécrétion...”. (*Ibid.*)

The significance of this episode for Divine is great, as her self-dramatisation and representation are ruined in favour of the Other, and replaced by the call to witness. Her declared feeling of filiality towards Notre-Dame-des-fleurs is an evocation of the Holy Family. Although this forms part of the Said in scripture, her declaration through Genet re-evokes it as part of the Saying, reaching beyond the rest of the court proceedings. For her, “des circonstances d’une exceptionnelle étrangeté l’avaient choisi comme lieu d’élection, sans lui en faire part.” (*Ibid.*, p.189) Finally, Notre-Dame pre-empts the death sentence, and we arrive at the limit of what may be represented:

Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs se sentait danser une légère gigue. Le désespoir l’avait traversé comme une flèche, comme un clown le papier de soie d’un cerceau, le désespoir l’avait dépassé et à lui il ne restait que cette déchirure, qui le mettait ainsi en loques blanches. (p.194)

In burlesque this image of piercing prefigures the ultimate experience of death which cannot be phenomenologically reduced: the image is torn at the same moment as the subject is who contemplates the image. From this position, the

destruction of the image rooted in sensibility becomes consonant with a useless suffering; with the fact that suffering may have no redemptory value whatsoever; with the fact that there is no presiding God who can register death and guarantee its meaning through the rending asunder of a curtain; with the fact that the marking of significance may be left up to mere technical pretence and artistry. Instead of a divine guarantor for meaning, Genet imagines a derisory illusion, “qu’un garmement irrévérencieux le troue d’un coup de pied et se sauve criant au miracle.” (p.195) Notre-Dame’s verbal intervention to the effect that he would like to die immediately cannot, for all that, take away death’s sting. But it does affirm death as meaningless and anonymous, and more importantly allows it to be witnessed, if not by the jury then by the reader.

Phronesis, described by Aristotle in Book Six of *The Nichomacean Ethics*, is the practical wisdom applied to the variable world outside of scientific knowledge, things “which may actually be otherwise”²⁵⁴, which serves to sober the subject, producing reflection, discouraging precipitation and honing judgement. It can be seen as providing a complement to *eupraxia*, “good action”²⁵⁵. In that its end is “merely doing well”²⁵⁶, *phronesis* would come sequentially between the *staging of the decision* in drama, and *poiesis*, which is blind to that which falls outside the creation of its product. David Haney identifies *phronesis* in Levinas as part of the constant renegotiation of the saying in relation to the said.²⁵⁷ This would allow the clear sightedness of *phronesis* to be read as necessarily following drama and preceding action. As part of the continuity of witnessing, *phronesis* must compete with exteriorities which irrupt upon the

²⁵⁴ Aristotle, *The Nichomacean Ethics*, 6.5, 1140a. p.150.

²⁵⁵ *Ethics*, 6.2, 1139b1-4 p.147.

²⁵⁶ *Ethics*, 6.5, 1140b5 p.150.

²⁵⁷ “[P]hronesis must express itself in techne, as in Levinas’s terms, that the “saying” of ethical experience is inevitably reduced to the “said” of discursive and conceptual structures.” (OB, pp.5-8) David P. Haney, ‘Aesthetics and Ethics in Gadamer, Levinas, and Romanticism: Problems of Phronesis and Techne’, *PMLA*, 114, 1, *Special Topic: Ethics and Literary Study*. (Jan, 1999) <[http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129\(199901\)114%3A1%3C32%3AAAEIGL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V32-45](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0030-8129(199901)114%3A1%3C32%3AAAEIGL%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V32-45)> [accessed 25 Januray 2008] 32-45 (p.43).

subject in both pleasure and pain.²⁵⁸ The displeasure caused the subject by both the plight and the commandment of the other shows the subject's vulnerability at the core of its ability to enjoy and threatens it with meaninglessness; with a droning, pre-thematic consciousness of the possibility "dans la souffrance de « souffrir pour rien »". (*AQE*, p.93, *AQEb*, p.119) This trial of the lucid vigilance of rationality hampers poesis, preventing suffering from entering an aesthetic or poietic logic, keeping it in the realm of election and assignation of the subject by the Other.

Nietzsche relates the ambiguity of the image of a tragic spectacle to the will, though in such a way that there is still an aesthetic justification for suffering:

The metaphysical joy in the tragic is a translation of the instinctive unconscious Dionysian wisdom into the language of images: the hero, the highest apparition of the will, is negated for our pleasure, because he is only phenomenon, and because the eternal life of the will is not affected by his annihilation. (*BofT*, p.104, Chapter 16)

It is important to note that for Nietzsche, it is the "eternal life of the will" which remains untouched, and not the spectator, who "seeks to grasp, with sympathetic feelings of love, the eternal suffering as its own." (p.112, Chapter 18) And yet, making the other one's own could risk becoming an elective choice, rather than election based on commandment, and, so represent for Levinas, a reverting to activity rather than an intervention on behalf of the other from a state of maximal unpreparedness, coming directly from one's own resources as in Liturgy, "une mise de fonds à perte". (*HdH*, p.45-46, 49) Levinas does, however, elsewhere speak of the will itself as anterior and posterior to art, "alpha et oméga à toute Représentation" (p.55); that the will unpreoccupied by the self, and before an unknowable order, may become a kind of humility:

²⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 6.5, 1140b 18, p.151.

humilité plutôt que volonté de puissance? Humilité qui ne se confond pas avec une équivoque négation de Soi, déjà orgueilleuse de sa vertu [...]; l'humilité de celui qui "n'a pas le temps" de faire un retour sur soi [...]. (*HdH*, p.55-56)

This *non-retour* would be the drama in the staging of the decision, as in Lear's realisation that he had taken too little care. It begins a work, perhaps inadvertently undertaken, which goes out to the infinity of the Other. (p.56) This does not quite assuage our fears, however, over "negation" or annihilation of the tragic individual "for pleasure" (*BofT*, p.104, Chapter 16), an idea that, as we shall show, greatly preoccupied both Valéry and Genet. Might it not be possible sequentially to enjoy the humility of the eternal will, and the predicament of the other therein, and then make a hasty return to the self, producing not even a ripple, never mind an irruption in being? In one sense this is the whole difficulty of ethics: something so elusive it has to be learned anew by everybody through the other all the time. Ethics serves to pitch an eschatology for the future against what can be achieved in the here and now. However, the implications of this unfinishedness have important aesthetic implications for the finite subject who craves for being to be made open to description. The Other represents a flaw in this describability, and puts the subject at risk of accepting an aesthetic gesture and allowing it to take precedence over an ethical intervention.

In both 'L'Âme et la Danse' and 'Eupalinos', Valéry offers a highly interesting exposition of aesthetics and architecture, each behaving as both refuges within and intensifications of ontology. These texts are written as Socratic dialogues, as though trying to relate the artistic and scientific modes to each other; indeed, they seem in part to take their inspiration from Socrates's late interest in music, as related in the *Phaedo*, during his imprisonment and just before his death.²⁵⁹ In 'L'Âme et la Danse', Socrates asks the doctor Eryximachus if there is

²⁵⁹ See also *BofT*, Chapter 15, p.122.

no cure for the poison of all nature, the poison, “[q]ui se nomme: l’ennui de vivre”:

J’entends, sache-le bien, non l’ennui passager; non l’ennui par fatigue, ou l’ennui dont on voit le germe, ou celui dont on sait les bornes; mais cet ennui parfait, ce pur ennui, cet ennui qui n’a point l’infortune ou l’infirmité pour origine, [...] – cet ennui enfin, qui n’a pas d’autre substance que la vie même, et d’autre cause seconde que la clairvoyance du vivant. Cet ennui absolu n’est en soi que la vie toute nue, quand elle se regarde clairement. (*ÂeD*, p.52)

The resemblance of this description to Levinas’s *il y a*, confinement in pure being, is striking, though has, consistent with a hint of self-admiration, drifted from anguish to *ennui* in pursuit of diversion. Furthermore, in Valéry’s text, Socrates comes up with a cure, which is not the entry into the time of the Other, but instead the use of a cultural stimulant. He goads one of the assembled:

Tu ne vois pas [...] que parmi toutes les ivresses, la plus noble, et qui est la plus ennemie du grand ennui, est l’ivresse due à des actes? Nos actes, et singulièrement ceux de nos actes qui mettent notre corps en branle, peuvent nous faire entrer dans un état étrange et admirable [...] (p.56)

Even though dance has earlier been said to “s’arrache[r] incessamment de sa propre forme” (p.42), this does not seem to be the face exceeding its plastic image described in *Totalité et infini*²⁶⁰, but instead an entry into the interval. As Levinas explains in ‘La Réalité et son ombre’ of the separate units of rhythm:

ils s’imposent à nous sans que nous les assumions. Ou plutôt, notre consentement à eux s’invertit en participation. Ils entrent en nous ou nous

²⁶⁰ *TeIb*, pp.165-66, *TeI*, p.128.

entrons en eux, peu importe. Le rythme représente la situation unique où l'on ne puisse parler de consentement, d'assomption, d'initiative, de liberté – parce que le sujet en est saisi et emporté. (*RO*, p.111, Levinas's emphasis)

Thus, carried away without initiative or liberty, time is transformed into the immobility of image, or as Levinas states later in the essay, the subject “fait partie de sa propre représentation”; or later that the artist takes events and immobilises them, “Ce qu'on appelle le choix de l'artiste traduit la sélection naturelle des faits qui se fixent en un rythme, transformant le temps en image.” (p.111, 122) This conversion of rhythm into an image is reminiscent of the dancer, Athikté, “immobile au centre même de son mouvement.” (*ÂeD*, p.67) It is disconcerting that during her performance for Socrates and his friends, they begin to describe the spectacle in tragic terms as “la plus noble destruction” (p.60). She falls, and while Phaedrus rushes to her aid, fearing she may die, Eryximachus gives his medical opinion:

Je n'ai pas coutume de hâter dans ses circonstances! Si les choses doivent s'arranger, il sied que le médecin ne les trouble point, et qu'il arrive un très petit moment avant la guérison, du même pas que les Dieux. (p.68)

The similarity to the final scene in Genet's *Haute surveillance*, the only play set in prison produced during his lifetime, is of considerable interest. Lefranc murders Maurice out of jealousy, and when Yeux-Verts, already condemned to death, knocks on the cell door to summon the guard, it opens immediately. It transpires that the guard and Surveillant Général of the prison had been watching all along:

On a tout entendu, tout vu. Pour toi de ton poste, ça devenait cocasse; pour nous de l'œilleton du judas ce fut une belle séquence tragique, merci. (*GTC*, pp.31-32)

The scene is interesting in that in these officials, the actor and spectator roles have been integrated, such that they become actor-spectators. (*HdH*, p.26) Were they in the antique chorus, they would interpret the events on stage as empirically real. Here, however, their relationship to those confined is unclear, as they could easily have prevented the ‘tragic’ events being applauded as though they were fictional. For them, the “eternal will” of ontology is not coincident with humility, but with their own will. Furthermore, because the voyeuristic role of this pathological chorus is suddenly linked with that of the spectator, the audience’s sobering up from this aesthetic experience is brutal and alters their enjoyment; turning a spectacle into the indecency of reality treated as spectacle. This pseudo-chorus, therefore, does not seek to draw spectators into the play as though it were reality, but into reality as though it were a play. Deprived of the gradations between stage and audience in the chorus, participation may run, alarmingly, unnoticed, moving between full involvement in the image to non-involvement in reality. It is almost as though we had been *feasting in the middle of a famine*, to echo ‘La Réalité et son ombre’. (*RO*, p.125) The link made in Levinas between confinement in an ontological category, reflected upon in the light of Jewish identity in his texts from 1933 to 1935²⁶¹, and the confinement within the aesthetic interval discussed in ‘La Réalité et son ombre’²⁶², seems, thus, to be being demonstrated in Genet’s theatre, and in this coda to the determinism of the unity of action.

It is as though the dereliction of duty towards sections of the political theatre were being thought through aesthetic terms. Genet’s understanding of the stage, therefore, has implications both on the individual and the communal level. In *Haute surveillance*, rather than forming themselves into an audience

²⁶¹ ‘La compréhension de la spiritualité dans les cultures française et allemande’ (1933), *Levinas*, ed. Danielle Cohen-Levinas (Paris: Bayard, 2007). *Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l’hitlérisme*, followed by an essay by Miguel Abensour (Paris: Payot et Rivages, 1997). See also ‘De l’évasion’, 1935, our *EV*; the lesser known, ‘L’inspiration religieuse de l’Alliance’, in *Paix et Droit*, 8, (Oct, 1935) 4; and ‘L’actualité de Maïmonide’, in *Paix et Droit*, 4 (April, 1935) 6-7. Both these last two texts are reproduced in *Cahier de l’Herne: Lévinas*.

²⁶² In *RO* Levinas explains ‘Ces animaux qui figurent des hommes donnent à la fable sa couleur propre parce qu’ils sont vus *comme* ces animaux et non pas *à travers* les animaux seulement [...]’ p.115.

concentrically around the *orkhestra*, as in ancient theatre, it is as though the spectators in an Italianate theatre, to their own surprise, have been formed around the spy hole in a prison door. Whereas the ancient theatre in its origins would have been one of Dionysian participation, this one is made up of unconnected interiorities who realise they have been hiding like Gyges, thanks to the theatre lighting which keeps them in the dark and the objects of their *jouissance* in a clear, conceptual brightness. The change in the role of the viewer alters this light discovering the unthought other. This irruption while traumatic arises not primarily through accusation, but through appeal, and it is to this, Visker explains, that we react with guilt and shame. (*TaS*, p.260) Genet's criticism of violence is launched not in the form of an accusation by Yeux-Verts, but by his appeal to Lefranc over the nonsense of his act. Just as the coda to the play draws attention to the relationship of the spectator to the event through the structure of the theatre, so shame, in Levinas, comes about from what we learn about the structure of our being. To refer back to Visker's analysis, the self-relatedness of my being shows my imperfection, and therefore also provides an intimation of perfection through the other. (*TaS*, p.260; *TeI*, p.56, *TeIb*, p.82) The passivity of the spectator-actor must, therefore, not be a deliberate, assumed action, but must come prior to the opposition between activity and passivity; otherwise there is a reversion into an act, and the danger that participation in an aesthetic event could be sufficient unto itself. (*AQE*, p.93, 118, *AQEb*, p.119, 148; *OB*, p.74, 93) So such a mode of participation would be not only futile, but present the graver risk of taking pain itself to be redemptive as we discussed in 'Messianisms', independent of action or repentance. (*DL*, p.105)

7. Production and the theatre

An important deciding factor in dictating kinds of action and production is the structure of the theatre itself, on which we shall now offer some remarks. In a thematising theatre, the subject assumes a “*recul infini*” (*DEE*, p.78) in relation to the spectacle, acting so as to suspend it, such that the binaries of dark-light, seating-stage, active-passive and subject-object are preserved. One could perhaps go so far as to consider the characters in such a representation as never having had to appear at all, but as having been ‘surveyed’, by virtue of an architectural feature peculiar to the Greek stage – the *skénè*. This is not the *scène* as in the French usage, but consists of a cabin or tent positioned in full view at the rear of the stage so that the actors appear from behind a covering, instead of from the wings. From the point of view of the object-actor, the spectator has already *raised the curtain* on the characters, making this pre-stage the stage. (*HdH*, p.25) In *Haute surveillance* the Surveillant Général’s presence, which participates in the theatrical event, acts on both sides of the spectacle; that is to say, both on the side of the subject-spectator, and within the spectacle in producing a relationship with the action on the stage. We ourselves are now actors operating at the heart of the spectacle. But through the Surveillant, Genet uses this technical positioning to turn the *scène* back into a *skénè*, creating a theatre taking place in the wings alone, from where the tragedy emanates, and from where the tragic action will be repeated. This seems to indicate that the flattening out of the *orkhestra*, and the privileging of the stage in Hegel, is followed in a modern political reading by a flattening and retraction of the space of the stage itself. The access to the stage of the tragic individual may be denied, or made only fleeting, and the stage as a conceptual space may allow the audience to savour, from a position of private interiority, the other’s pain as meaningful. These compressions of space offer insights into the way experience is produced, viewing theatre as both an edifice and a practice to describe the workings of subjectivity.

Benjamin remarks on the loss of the orchestra in an essay on Brecht, describing it as an abyss separating stage from audience, in the service of which

playwrights continue to put pen to paper even though it is no longer in use.²⁶³ Genet remarks in a letter to Roger Blin that *Les Nègres* and *En attendant Godot* were the only modern plays that could be performed in a classical Greek theatre, addressing a community as a whole, countering the confined Italianate theatre. (*GTC*, pp.939-41) One may thus be given clues as to Genet's unusually practical commentary that if plays are to offer more than diversion for an audience too much the master of its own conscience, then the form of the theatre has yet to be discovered. (*EMD*, p.11)

In Valéry's 'Eupalinos ou l'Architecte', which figures a dialogue in the spirit world taking place on the banks of the Styx, the experience of music as measurement and interval is extended into ideas of architecture. While architecture is a suspension of the architect's and subject's will in stone, music is a suspension of the composer's and listener's will in melody.²⁶⁴ For Socrates in Valéry's text, the music forms a temple producing a mobile-immobility, reminiscent of Athikté's dance, through a merging of "[la] pierre" and "l'air" in what is simultaneously an artistic sensation and a physical construction. (*Eup*, p.126, p.128) It is as though the *il y a*, temporarily evaded through activity (technical or artistic), had been fed straight back, once more, into the intensification of the *fatum*. Socrates urges Phaedrus to remember the "fête" or symposium²⁶⁵, which "emplissait la salle de sons et de fantômes":

Ne te semblait-il pas que l'espace primitif était substitué par un espace intelligible et changeant; [...]. N'était-ce pas une plénitude changeante, analogue à une flamme continue, éclairant et réchauffant tout ton être par

²⁶³ As Benjamin observes, the form of modern theatre concerns the stage more than it does drama. 'What is epic theatre?'. Consulted in Walter Benjamin, *Essais sur Brecht*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Philippe Ivernel (Paris: La Fabrique, 2003), pp.18-34.

²⁶⁴ As the architect, Eupalinos, used to say, "Il n'y a pas de détails dans l'exécution", (*Eup*, p.86), in a similar way to Nietzsche speaking in the singular of "a tremendous symphonic movement [ungeheuren symphonischen Satz]" in Wagner, without the aid of word or image. (*BofT*, Chapter 21. pp.126-27)

²⁶⁵ In the *Symposium*, Socrates is himself qualified by Alcibiades in Dionysian terms as a musician of philosophy, and as like the satyr Marsyas. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 215a5 - 216c3, pp.60-62.

une incessante combustion de souvenirs, de pressentiments, de regrets et de présages, et d'une infinité d'émotions sans causes précises? Et ces moments, et leurs ornements; et ces danses sans danseuses, et ces statues sans corps et sans visage [...], ne te semblaient-ils pas t'environner, toi, esclave de la présence générale de la Musique? Et cette production inépuisable de prestiges, n'étais-tu pas enfermé avec elle, et contraint de l'être, comme une pythie dans sa chambre de fumée? (pp.125-26)

It seems that this ominous *intelligible* space may become *physical* space once again in a different historical moment – in a parallel setting, though in radically different circumstances. We refer once more to the “destruction noble” (*ÂeD*, p.60) of Athikté's performance, in which “on croirait que la danse lui sort du corps comme une flamme!” (p.59)²⁶⁶ These already disturbing descriptions of confinement and fire from the 1920s are impossible to read without greater disquiet in the post-Second World War period, so much do they seem to contain a presentiment of the Nazi horror. But how, then, should art and philosophy treat this memory of the Nazi horror, which is beyond both theodicy as well as the representational powers of the tragic?

Genet seems to have been influenced by the Valéry remarks quoted above when, in the ‘L'Étrange mot d'...’, he explains that modern society's hygienic attitude to mortality is depriving it of a great theatrical resource. He imagines a

²⁶⁶ And later, “Cette femme qui est là est dévorée de figures innombrables [...]” (*ÂeD*, p.62) These problematic quotations are not alone. We remember that in *Monsieur Teste*, Valéry commented of the audience “qu'ils jouissent et obéissent” (*M.T.*, p.26); while Huguette Laurenti has gathered other remarks from the *Cahiers* in which Valéry describes the theatre as “[une] machine pour traiter les humains en nombre”; or as staging an event described as “massique” (p.131); or again, “ce théâtre, couleur de boucherie – étal – Mâchoire” (p.133); and above all the description of a visit to the theatre in March 1928, in Vienna:

Je retrouve mes impressions de jadis. Époque de Teste. Les réunions d'humains (ici bien enchâssés et formés en rangées) me font toujours un étrange effet.

On n'a pas fait la nuit totale – il y a des lampes dans l'arrière des loges. Le tout a la lueur sourde et puissante d'un intérieur de four chauffé au dehors. (p.131)

Huguette Laurenti, *Paul Valéry et le théâtre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973). The above page numbers refer to this volume.

theatre in close proximity to the disposal of the remains of the dead, so that the frequentation of these sites by the living can be at least partially ensured. We read of a theatre in a graveyard in which “le public devra passer par des chemins (pour y venir et s’en aller) qui longeront les tombes.” (*EMD*, p.14) The proposal resonates in several ways. Firstly, society understood as comprised of its modes of production would render that society poetical, and mean that it could become lost in architectural projects²⁶⁷; if society forms its modes of production in interactions between people, then it is a question of *praxis*, and how best to act. Whereas drama, to reiterate the main argument running through this chapter, is the challenge presented by phenomena to the individual, prior to action, and prior to thematisation. Genet contests that if understanding society as comprised of its modes of production is the primary form of its objectivation, and if theatre is to be saved, theatre should be shifted away from a closed theatre of illusory depiction à la Grand Balcon, and towards theatrical representation of the material conditions of interaction, as Benjamin describes. Genet writes:

À un Italien qui voulait construire un théâtre dont les éléments seraient mobiles et l’architecture changeante, selon la pièce qu’on y jouerait, je répondis avant même qu’il eût achevé sa phrase que l’architecture du théâtre est à découvrir, mais elle doit être fixe, immobilisée, afin qu’on la reconnaisse responsable: elle sera jugée sur sa forme. (p.11)

With the move away from a theatre of illusion, there is a proposed move towards theatre as concrete production, reflecting at once the immobility of the Same, but also the production of events, of intrigues and of multiple viewpoints detailed by the Other. Here, as we quoted Levinas saying at the start of the chapter, “l’infini se produit dans la relation du Même et l’Autre”. (*Tel*, XIV, *Telb*, p.13) Thus the infinite is created in the realm of the concrete and the real, within which we may be held responsible.

²⁶⁷ Which would also include quotas, sliderules and railway timetables.

The unity of action is mocked at the end of *Haute surveillance* by the scandal of a change in tone from poetic tragedy to comedy, which at the same time draws the witness into the role of protagonist. Genet now carries the critique of determinism in tragedy to the point of venturing to propose a theatre-crematorium, where the destruction of the hero as image leaves behind a piece of architecture as a permanent part of the City. The extreme discomfort which Genet's comparison can cause comes from the way it describes architecture itself both as a practice and a product, in which some part of the mystery, or enigma, of the human as well as the inhuman encounter is to be found. The critical disposition of the theatregoer would be receptive to the concrete as co-creator of the conditions of the world, which come "autant de l'urbanisme que de la culture". (EMD, p.15) Yet there is also a caesura, and this is what causes the real discomfort, for we are no longer in the realm of spectacle or of representation. As Levinas explains in 'Humanisme et an-archie':

Là où j'aurais pu rester spectateur, je suis responsable, c'est-à-dire encore, parlant. Rien n'est plus théâtre, le drame n'est plus jeu. Tout est grave. (HdH, p.87)

The relation between *produire* and *produit* could also be described, to borrow a description from *Autrement qu'être* of the process of becoming an essence, as a verb fallen back into a substantive. (AQE, p.52, AQEb, p.70) In that light, Genet's comparison should be thought of as a verb kept "en éveil" from this lapse back into the substantive and the concrete; neither action nor result, but "parlant" in the register of the saying. It is through this evocative power, Levinas tells us, that in Valéry's 'Eupalinos', "l'architecture fait chanter les édifices." (Ibid., Ibidb) This chant, however, is not primarily part of the illusory-aesthetic, but instead produces a relation to the concrete said which vibrates in relation to the real, and not to play; in relation to historical events.

Rather than being circumscribed within the dramatic action, Genet's theatrical proposal with its qualities of fable shifts the catastrophe from a terminal

to an inaugural position.²⁶⁸ The optimism of this theatre, whereby there are no longer theatregoers, but workers encouraged to sing or whistle, is significant. (*EMD*, p.9) Genet seems to use aesthetics to draw our attention to unbridled poiesis, coming from everyone and everywhere in the concrete conditions surrounding us. But even more than that, the comparison allows Genet to extend a critique of tragedy focused on the tragic hero to one that includes the betrayals arising from the idea of universal history, in which “la Ville ou l’État veulent se défaire, pour ainsi dire en bloc, d’une autre communauté”. (p.9) That is to dispose of another community understood in terms of ethnicity, religion, language or some other marker of alterity. While Hegel’s poietic theatre sought to minimise the role of the chorus in favour of the conceptual space of the stage, in Genet it is the staging of the chorus which is prioritised. So whereas in Hegel the synthesis of concept is assured by aesthetically dramatising and consuming the Other, in Genet the tragedy of universal history loses the alibi of being mere aesthetics, or representation, and is contaminated by the real. This could be the moment at which the absurdity of the *il y a* submerges comprehension in nonsense, and may deprive the subject of self-referentiality, resulting in the “« dénucléation » du bonheur imparfait” – the imperfect happiness of the aesthetic experience: translated by Lingis as “coring out”. (*AQE*, p.81, *AQEb*, p.105; *OB*, 64) If sense is overrun by nonsense, the only way sense can bypass nonsense again is in personal engagement. As Llewelyn points out, if “everyone is my contemporary in the diachronic time of responsibility, [...] there is a sense in which I was at Auschwitz”.²⁶⁹ This responsibility does not translate directly into simple guilt, but into hyperbolic responsibility, a responsibility for the responsibility of the other; this other may be friend, foe, near, far, personally known or unknown to us, but nonetheless calls us to account for individual failings, individual moments in which the call to ethics of the face has been received with intolerance. In this sense, Levinas tells us, we are all anti-Semites, in the

²⁶⁸ Nicolas Doutey, ‘Le regard et le présent’, p.636.

²⁶⁹ John Llewelyn, *Appositions of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), p.138.

répugnance à l'inconnu du psychisme d'autrui, au mystère de son intériorité ou par-delà toute agglomération en ensemble et toute organisation en organisme, à la pure proximité de l'autre homme, c'est-à-dire à la socialité elle-même. (*ADV*, p.223)

This makes the events at Dachau the source of a diachronic responsibility from which we cannot be absolved, just as we cannot be absolved from our passivity in response to conflicts that take place in the here and now, wherever they may be. In the same way that we are all anti-Semites, Levinas argues that we are all Jewish. This repugnance faced with the other is also what we have been exploring in the bipolar impulse occasioned by the other, and which we examined throughout Chapter One. This begs the question, though – especially in the context of 'L'Étrange mot d'...', in which Genet makes a generalised accusation of anti-Semitism against the chorus's cooperation with the State in doing away with an individual or community (*EMD*, p.9) – as to whether Genet, whose corpus embodies bipolar moral impulses with unusual strength, can himself be dismissed as anti-Semitic?

8. The space of witnessing

Our earlier reading of Hegel and Nietzsche which culminated in Genet's reading of the theatre-crematorium suggests that rather than being a snub directed at Adorno's cautioning over the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz, such a massive and provocative critique as Genet's is instead prompted by a preoccupation with the trace and the difficulties of witnessing. Theatrical speculation is pursued in relation to the dead individual. In 'L'Étrange mot d'...', Genet proposes an alternative *fête* to Valéry's sinister prefiguration, and one that is not pure inebriation. In an ancient Roman burial ceremony, the mourners, the enemies and the inquisitive form the public in attendance; the coffin is placed at

the front of the stage²⁷⁰; the funeral mime preceding the procession then splits in two, and multiplies in number, in order to represent the key scenes of the man's life:

qu'il devienne troupe théâtrale et qu'il fasse, devant le mort et le public, revivre et remourir le mort [...]. (EMD, p.17)

The mime would appear to behave as an explanation of the community to itself, of what or who has come to pass. Strangely, the alliteration used to express the task – *remourir le mort* – seems at the same time to suggest that the actors might *remémorer le mort* in a traceable internal echo; yet here there is no chance of matching up protension and retension, of finding out what actually happened. The time the actors are referring to is beyond memory. The ending of the imagined scene is surprisingly unostentatious, and yet meaningful:

qu'ensuite on reprenne le cercueil pour le porter en pleine nuit, jusqu'à la fosse; enfin que le public s'en aille: la fête est finie. (*Ibid.*)

It is worth venturing a last reflection on the form of this theatre, which is haunted by elements of antiquity. It is not by accident that the coffin is buried in the *fosse*, – that is the '*fosse d'orchestre*', or pit. While the *orkhestra* as a space has been filled in since Roman times, is not Genet proposing its reemergence in modern theatre? Not simply in its vestigial form as orchestra pit, but as a kind of symbolic *fosse commune* for the discovery and animation of the dead? Furthermore, if one goes back to Greek theatre, the appearance of the actors through the *skénè*, originally a place of celebration, means that instead of making an entrance they were making an exit²⁷¹; this is remodelled by Genet to give an exit from the *skénè* onto the stage²⁷² and then from the stage into the pit, or *orkhestra*. It is worth

²⁷⁰ One can imagine the coffin placed on a catafalque as in *Les Nègres*.

²⁷¹ See Denis Guénoun, 'Grand témoin', *Action et acteur*, pp.198-99.

²⁷² Nietzsche describes Plato's account of Socrates's death as an exit, as though he were leaving

reminding ourselves here of the other instances of stagecraft in Genet's plays which exploit the ambiguities of theatre architecture. In *Le Balcon*, the Chief of Police, who is deified as the foremost representative of power, is entombed in the Mausoleum, which is described as resembling a well or the inside of a tower with an underground spiral staircase. The choices open to the director are to place the tomb either in the pit or in the *skénè*, although the Mausoleum is already underground, which might favour the former. (Tableau 9, *GOC4*, p.126)²⁷³ In *Les Paravents*, Genet writes the deaths of the characters, which conventionally would take place off stage after an exit, as entrances onto a posthumous area of the stage (Tableau 14), with the Mother piercing through the screens that have been used to form a constantly changing background to each *tableau* throughout the play. For Genet the *orkhestra*, as an intermediate zone between actor and public, may be dramatically recaptured, and become in some way the issuing point of the drama, in common with the *skénè*.²⁷⁴

Derrida comments indirectly on the status of the “fosse” in ‘L’Étrange mot d’...’, although he focuses its significance on Genet’s critical standpoint with regard to absolute knowledge. Absolute knowledge necessarily relies on the absorption of alterity and its inhumation in synthesis. Literature records this process whilst at the same time reconnecting certain lines of intrigue, enabling us to follow fortunes, to plot lines of ascent and descent as well as the moments at which they are broken or reconnected. The ability to record this process, as we have argued, is determined by genre in the extent to which it cooperates with, and exemplifies, or else exceeds unity of action. As Hegel’s account in the *Aesthetics*

the symposium or banquet to start a new day, “while on the benches and on the earth his drowsy table companions remain behind to dream of Socrates, the true eroticist.” *BofT*, p.89, Chapter 13. This represents another movement beyond inebriation, sleep and illusion contained in the image.

²⁷³ The chapel of *Les Invalides* containing Napoleon is more of a mausoleum than a crypt, as rather than being partially hidden and reached by steps, it opens onto a circumference of ten metres directly under the transept and is as ostentatious as the altar to which it prevents access. The giant tomb is surrounded by the names of the campaigns fought. It is as though the oculus usually serving as a skylight were fulfilling its less common role of connecting the relic under the altar to the body of the church, as in early octagonal chapels.

²⁷⁴ The *skénè* is also reminiscent of the bridge from the spirit world in No theatre. The *waki*, the monk support character, first to make the crossing, enters there, as well as the ghost protagonist.

of the relation of the tragic hero to Spirit shows, this is a teleological narrative of being. This narrative and its goal of absolute knowledge is exceeded and disordered by alterity, which resists a grand narrative of this kind. Derrida observes early in *Glas* Genet inspecting the defeats suffered by absolute knowledge:

Il n'écrit presque plus, il a enterré la littérature comme pas un, il saute partout où le savoir absolu de l'Europe en prend un coup [...]. (*Glas*, 45b)

This image is returned to towards the end of the text, embedded in a commentary on 'L'Étrange mot d'...' which shows the continuity from the funeral mime, and in which Derrida ventriloquises Genet: "Là je saute, allez voir vous-même ce que devient la mort pendant la fête." (260b) This jumping describes not only a political restlessness, alluded to in the first quotation, but also a hint in the "allez voir vous même" that Genet himself might be seen as jumping into the pit with the unremembered dead, and inviting the reader to the same.

If our construal of these lines of Derrida are correct, they could still risk indulging in a figurative excess which Levinas would be the first to denounce. However, the very last section of 'L'Étrange mot d'...' attempts to follow the trace not through a relic of theatre architecture in its correspondance with the structure of subjectivity, but in language. In Derrida's remark, it is literature that has been buried; though, it is equally literature that may help to reissue meaning in the uses to which language may be put as an encounter between alterities; in the mutations of "ces mots dialectophages", in which "le sens se perd non dans la nuit des temps mais dans l'infini des mutations tendres ou brutales." (*EMD*, p.18,17) These mutations of meaning are caused by uncrossable distances between interlocutors each leaving their mark in language. Language may receive the trace of the Other, and open the dramatic *staging of the decision* in the readers or listeners themselves.

The role of witness, and of inspiration and prophecy, is important for Genet's writing from the earliest texts onwards. In *Pompes funèbres* we read of

the mystery of Incarnation, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. (*PF*, p.57) Genet's is then not a disincarnated theatre of ideas whose realisation is applied poietically to the world, and still less one of the indulgent illusion we call escapism. These would require an ordering of meaning and output which the trace in language instead serves to disorder, producing meaning instead as a byproduct which the incarnate subject must make its own, through interpretation and embodiment. The newness of this experience means that this theatre does not hanker after a tragic past, but instead proposes a future performance:

proposée par un autre mort dont la vie méritera une représentation dramatique, non tragique. La tragédie il faut la vivre, pas la jouer. (*EMD*, p.18)

If tragedy as such has become impracticable, then we should practise instead the creation of the stage, or the field of the experience of our very existence, which is where and how the phenomena of the human are exposed, in drama or *dran*. For tragedy to be lived by the spectator after his or her exit from the theatre, then each has to feel the enchainment of others to being, and of themselves to their own roles.

At the end of 'La Réalité et son ombre', Levinas expresses the dependence of cognition on exegesis by signalling the usefulness of art to philosophy; the ambiguity of image contains multiple possibility, such that "[l]e philosophe découvre, au-delà du rocher ensorcelé où [l'image] se tient – toutes ses possibles qui rampent autour [...]". (*RO*, p.126) It is these possibilities that are relived through Genet's dead, by an audience comprised of individuals taking the fate-bound image and making it move and speak. Valéry evokes this interruption of the image and its silence in 'Cantique des colonnes'²⁷⁵ (1922); once again, the participatory nature of the *orkhestra* comes to life:

²⁷⁵ Valéry, 'Cantique des Colonnes', *Charmes* (1922) in *VOI*, p.116-18.

Douces colonnes, ô
L'orchestre des fuseaux!
Chacun immole son
Silence à l'unisson.

And then, in the voices of the columns themselves, now that the silence is broken, the columns seek out dancing partners, animating the fabric and occupants of a bygone world who are only present through an animation of inscribed traces:

Nous primes pour danseurs
Brises et feuilles sèches,

Et les siècles par dix,
Et les peuples passés,
C'est un profond jadis,
Jadis jamais assez!

The “profond jadis” evoked through the unknown origin of the trace is attendant on the irruption, in spite of oneself, of the Other, who signifies, beyond any intention to form a sign. Valéry is not indicating technical prowess in the image, or its capacity to announce “un avenir à jamais avenir” (*RO*, p.119), but evoking an irretrievable past that may guide the subject, the “délégué” of being in the present. (*HdH*, p.28) In that sense, art may be a celebration. A celebration which, coupled with exegesis, may aid in the (re)cognition of our roles in a non-tragic future.

Conclusion

We have seen in the neighbourhood which gives this dissertation its title that anti-social tendencies which are apparently discrete may reveal themselves to be responsive to alterity, even if that response takes the form of a refusal of alterity or its subversion. In this sense, the term “neighbourhood”, as both a space of possible meeting and a collection of people has been suggestive in our discussions, and indicates a said made up of different sayings.

Returning to the encounters made by Genet in this neighbourhood, and which we discussed in Chapter One, we remember that for Bakhtin Dostoevsky was able to reproduce heteroglossia and the living word of others within it, but that Bakhtin was hostile to other genres, especially reified poetry. However, the difficulty of tracing the particular other with whose word one may be in contact does not prevent Genet’s work from having a highly dialogic quality. Set next to Dostoevsky’s living, breathing multivoiced world, it would be incorrect to see the intuned language and viewpoint of Genet as being dependent for its sense on an only occasional chink of light illuminating his underground cell. Genet creates meetings across literary history, which change radically the meaning of the original characters and situations he brings together. This form of adaptaton is already a meeting in separation, and rather than a totem or centre, creates instead a *non-lieu*. We saw in Chapter Two that it is possible to read the trace of the Other not only in the human or its accoutrements, but also alter-humanistically in the apparently inanimate world.

To return to a methodological problem with which the dissertation has been faced, by working on just a very few literary and philosophical precursors one could have run the risk of circumscribing a problematic that takes transcendence as one of its objects, and yet wants attribute an origin to it. The opposite danger is that through too broad an approach, the idea of a sequence with its own logic, while not thought of as a genealogy, would be lost. Instead we were careful to pursue the mutations of the Other in our authors not directly through the

shifting meanings of *différance*, but through differences of signature in alterity and influence; that is, through the idea of neighbourhood as suggesting difference of signature grappling with similar encounters.

The simultaneous flexibility and etymological rootedness of literary expression permits fine traces to be pursued across great distances. As Levinas comments in *Autrement qu'être*, philosophy also has an organic relationship to language, expression and encounter, and is described as a drama

où entre toujours de nouveaux interlocuteurs qui ont à redire, mais où les anciens reprennent la parole pour y répondre dans les interprétations qu'ils suscitent, et où cependant, malgré ce manque de « sûreté en marche » – ou à cause de lui – à personne n'est permis ni un relâchement d'attention, ni un manque de rigueur. (*AQE*, p.25, *AQEb*, p.39)

This is also a calling across time and space and from within another's speech in its resaying. This revisiting and reanimation of another's inscription is also reminiscent of signature and countersignature in Derrida's thought, in which the accumulation of marks, and remarks, creates supplementary meaning. In this sense Derrida's 'En ce moment même' is an instance of difference of signature with Levinas; and the *mise en espace* of *Glas* an instance of countersignature between Genet and Hegel on the nature of *savoir absolu*. There may also, however, be the trace of Levinas's signature in this latter text, as we have already mentioned, and which may point elsewhere.

In a paragraph from 'De la conscience à la veille' from *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* we find examples of reinflected terms derived from the *il y a* used to describe the beyond being, and in receptivity to the Other. They are "insomnie", "déchirement", and "ôtage":

Insomnie ou déchirement qui est non pas la finitude d'un être incapable de se rejoindre et de « demeurer en repos » en guise d'état d'âme, mais

transcendance, déchirant ou inspirant l'immanence qui, de prime abord, enveloppe comme si de l'infini il pouvait y avoir idée, c'est-à-dire comme si Dieu pouvait tenir en moi. Veille sans intentionalité mais seulement reveillée sans cesse de son état même de veille, se dégrisant de son identité pour le plus profond que soi. Subjectivité comme susception de l'Infini, soumission à un Dieu et intérieur et transcendant. *En soi*, libération *de soi*. Liberté de l'éveil plus libre que la liberté du commencement qui se fixe en principe.[*] Elle ressemble à celle qui éclate dans la proximité du prochain, dans la responsabilité pour l'autre homme où, cependant, unicité du non-interchangeable, condition ou incondition d'ôtage, je suis unique et élu. (*DVI*, pp.51-52)

“Insomnie”, “déchirement”, and the status of “ôtage” cease to be for the self and are a wakefulness, an openness, and proneness before the Other. The inability for the subject to remain unmoved before the Other bespeaks its exposure to the beyond being even within being. Here, in the self, there is an awakening from a pre-existing position of watchfulness, which is freer than the effort involved in re-engaging with being in commencement, detailed in *De l'existence à l'existant*. And yet the real interest of this quotation for our conclusion lies in a footnote that appears where we have placed the asterisk. Here the “dégrisement” or “réveil” mentioned is related to a biblical character, Samson:

La bible hébraïque pour nommer l'éveil religieux de Samson dit (Juges 13,25): « l'esprit de l'Éternel commença à agiter à Mahané-Dan... ». Elle emploie pour ‘agiter’ le terme ‘vatipaëm’, mot de la même racine que le mot ‘paamon’ – cloche. L'esprit s'agitant comme le battement ou la percussion dont résonnent ou vibrent les sons de cloche. (*DVI*, p.51)

That this spiritual awakening or agitation should take place for Samson at a time after he has lost his strength is remarkable, and yet he finds new sources of energy through an ‘interior and transcendent God’. We should point out that the agitation

or percussion of the term 'vatipaēm', etymologically related to 'paamon', the word for bell, in this article dating from 1974²⁷⁶, may be related to another 1974 text, this time by Derrida, that is *Glas*, which is the word for knell. This produces a number of repercussions, whether Derrida commenting upon Levinas or Levinas on Derrida.

Glas' subtitle in the paperback version, 'Que reste-t-il du savoir absolu'²⁷⁷, refers to the erosion of the columns one by the other, implying that the strict architectural delimitation of the two writers involved, Genet and Hegel, had become strewn with traces, echoes and signatures. It is therefore possible that the ringing of the knell, marking the demise of *savoir absolu*, is performed by the clapper of a spiritual agitation between the two columns. These might be the two columns of a temple comprising on the one hand knowledge in Hegel, and on the other hand illusion in Genet. It is Samson's waking to an inner-call of the other which sets this process in motion. This would endow the weakness of the Other with the strength of Samson. As Visker explains, Levinas

treat[s] the appeal of the Other as the echo-chamber, as it were, in which the sound of a bell which was ringing in me all along, not only becomes audible for the first time *but also finds its only possible meaning* which is, of course, ethical. (*TaS*, p.344)

This inner-agitation through the acoustic of the other has the potential to produce far reaching exterior effects.

In Genet's ethico-aesthetic texts, the *Atelier*, 'Rembrandt déchiré' and 'Fragments' – though also 'Le secret de Rembrandt', and 'Le funambule', that we have not discussed – the importance of the other inscribing itself on consciousness is described with great attentiveness, and without quite the same intensity of moral hermeticism that we find in the novels. The theoretical approach we have

²⁷⁶ Levinas, 'De la connaissance à la veille', *Bijdragen*, 35 (1974), in *DVI*.

²⁷⁷ Derrida, *Glas: Que reste-t-il du savoir absolu* (Paris: Éditions Gonthier/Médiations, 1981).

adopted to Genet's theatre, often admired for its qualities of being *solidaire* rather than *solitaire*, has been to read it as an epic of the self neighbouring other selves.

At the end of Chapter Three, we arrived at an analysis of 'L'Étrange mot d'...' and interpreted it polyvalently as an allegory reworking Valéry and arguing against tragic determinism. We arrived at the position whereby Genet is creating a general indictment of anti-Semitism understood as the hatred of the other man. 1967, the year of this publication, is significant for Genet since it also marks the last of his ethico-aesthetic texts and the beginning of his political writings. There have been problems in recent debate understanding the circulation within different periods the genres used by Genet. Our approach has sought to overcome them by using bridges of influence from works by other authors whose influence can be discerned both upstream and downstream from enigmatic or problematic sections in Genet's own works, and thus bring us closer through a chiasmic reading to the crux or *creux* of his thought.

What these works hold in common is a Levinasian understanding of the disruption of the face. The face is at the same time "l'expression originelle" and "le premier mot: « tu ne commettras pas de meurtre »." (*TeI*, p.173, *Telb*, p.217) The concomitance of the appearance of particularity with commandment is what allows interpretation through adaptation so powerfully to map the parallel repercussions of encounters with alterity. It matters little what Valéry thought of Genet's work when Cocteau read him passages from *Notre-Dame-des-fleurs* and replied that the book should be destroyed – "Brûlez-le"²⁷⁸. What does matter is the use to which Genet may have put certain of Valéry's texts, in an activity derived from an encounter among encounters producing iteration, as Valéry himself describes when discussing influence in his 'Lettre sur Mallarmé'. (*VOI*, p.634) The interactions between the upstream and the downstream of Valéry means there is influence on Genet, but no question of describing him as a *Valéryen*. In a similar way, the fact of his having worked from certain of the same source texts as Levinas will not make Genet a Levinasian or Levinas a Genetian. Instead, our

²⁷⁸ Cocteau's journal quoted in White, *Jean Genet*, p.212.

method has sought to examine bipolar ethical reactions to the presence of the Other in different writers, and to compare them. After all, as Genet writes, referring to just a part of the face, “les yeux [...] appellent comme pour un sauvetage ou un anéantissement”. (*CQR*, p.31) Levinas makes a similar observation when he explains in 1982, just after the events of Sabre and Chatila, that in the other “we can find the enemy”.²⁷⁹

This leads us on sequentially to mention Genet’s final work. While the imaginary and symbolic are unusually affirmed in Genet’s oeuvre, his greatest preoccupation is with their relationship to reality. And yet his affirmed fantasy and nightmare visions in *Un captif amoureux* suggest that the fault-line separating artistic symbol, imagination and reality has only become more unstable. Félix Guattari explains that, “sa maîtrise de l’écriture n’a abouti qu’à une exacerbation de ses contradictions et de ses déchirements”. (*GR*, p.30) The constant, however, is the concreteness of the encounter with the other, which gives insights into the circulation between the mind and the world. In the light of the methods of this study, it should be possible to pursue a rereading of *Un captif amoureux* in the light of the symbolic and the imaginary *in so far as they are also real*. Hence, as Genet writes, “Évidemment sous mon récit un autre pousse et voudrait venir au monde.” (*CA*, p.320) This is a text without circumscribed context, but which instead promises another text. Guattari studies this point in the light of Bakhtinian dialogism before moving from the dialogic to what he calls the ‘synaptic’. This is a less personological, intersubjective way of discussing the way the Other comes to mind. It seeks to render visible the mobility of image modules, reading them at a finer level as ‘synaptic operators’ capable of producing change. They are used in this way in the deterritorialising description of the Pièta as a Palestinian symbol of revolution in Hamza and his mother in *Un captif amoureux*. Going upstream again from *Un captif amoureux*, between 1976 and 1978 Genet wrote four different

²⁷⁹ ‘Éthique et politique’, *Les Nouveaux Cahiers*, 18 (1982-83), 71, 1-8. Transcript of the discussion between Alain Finkielkraut and Levinas, invited by Schlomo Malka to speak on Israel and Jewish Ethics on *Radio Communauté*, 28 September 1982, repr. *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (New York: Blackwell, 1989), p.289.

versions of a film scenario, 'La nuit venue', in which a Moroccan boy comes to settle in Paris, and on the first day, after losing his belongings and money, is visited by an Angel, with whom he wrestles. This evokes the renaming of Jacob after wrestling with an Angel, and before receiving the name of Israel. (*Genesis* 32) Next a priest from the Sacré Cœur who witnessed the meeting tells his doubting colleagues, "Je n'ai pas eu une vision simple, moi, j'ai eu la vision d'une vision."²⁸⁰ While this is highly enigmatic, it gives clues as to the later deneutralised use of religious imagery at work in *Un captif amoureux*.

The disseminatory practice of *Un captif amoureux* is new in relation to the other texts in the pains it takes to describe the real as it detaches itself from the dying author. The way in which it strews signatures on its way is far more discreet than in Derrida's *Glas*, and is far more rooted in historical events than elsewhere in Genet's oeuvre. At the same time, this text fuses that reality with unusually dense meeting points of the imagination. If the agitation or sounding of a bell may bring with it an ethical re-concentration on the other, then it may also produce a clearing away of what was self-referentiality and illusion. However, as with the near side and the beyond of being, there is no chance of Samson, inspired by the Other, doing more than creating a fissuring in the subject. The call of the Other does not clear away the fragments or rubble of the Same which instead remain. It is between these fragments that we live, and in which we are able to discern alterity, assume worry and take risks on its behalf.

Does Genet really unsay (*dédit*) any of his darker assertions? Or can their unsaying only be undertaken by the reader, as strands of sense, separated along tracts of contradictory meaning, are traced back, bewilderingly, not to the same signature, but to the unreadable signature of a plural world?

²⁸⁰ *La nuit venue*, version 2, IMEC. p.51-52, 54.

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